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A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED:

BEING A SEQUEL

TO "THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD."

BY

GILLAN VASE.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL II.

London:

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5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1878.

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A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER I.

UNFULFILLED DREAMS OF AN ANGULAR MAN.

NOT one word does Mr. Grewgious utter as they pass through Holborn. He mechanically allows his young companion to conduct him along, and, shuffling at his side, has very much the pitiful, stunned and bewildered expression of a dumb animal being driven to the butcher's.

He utters a suppressed sound occasionally—a sort of piteous appeal to the universe—and sometimes stops suddenly and stands still, looking round inanely, as one may often notice an ox or a sheep do, as if wondering if there is no one—no one in the vast multitude—to save him from his fate. Then, upon a sign from the driver, trudges on again, in a sort of dull stupefaction.

And, in this manner, they arrive at Staple Inn, and enter the dominions of P. J. T., who, represented by his initials, seems, to Mr. Grewgious' fancy, to wink down upon

them fiendishly, enjoying the discomfiture of his successor, Positively Jocosely To-night.

Mr. Brandis, having safely deposited his employer in his easy chair, and lit the lamp upon the round table, is about to retire with a warm "Good-night, and thank you, sir," when, noticing how helplessly distressed the old man seems, he lingers a moment on the threshold to enquire, "Can I do anything more for you before I go?"

"Don't go yet," answers Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his face and head before looking up at him. "Furnival's will be sending in my bit of supper presently, and I beg you to stay and partake of it with me. I feel so lonely to-night," he adds, glancing with a scared expression up to the stars, shining peacefully in the night sky; and, as the clerk still hesitates, he adds further, with pathetic earnestness, "I really had a mother, you know!"

Mr. Brandis considers this statement highly probable, in point of fact incontrovertible.

"She was old when I was born, and, I should think, judging from my experience of her, must have been old-fashioned always. But she was a good mother to me, and, perhaps, none the worse for that; and, if I am angular and full of deficiencies, it would be

a sin to lay it at her door. I felt it hard, that thrust," he goes on, as Mr. Brandis seats himself at his side; "I know—no man better—how unfitted I am to deal with the gentler sex. No one, I feel sure, can be more—shall I say?—*impregnated* with that fact. Ha! here is Furnival's with my bit of supper; therefore, casting aside for the present all unpleasant reflections, let us eat and be thankful."

As the waiter lays the cloth and arranges the supper—a cold chicken, some dainty slices of ham, and a fresh green salad—Mr. Grewgious, first bidding him fetch another plate and knife and fork, and to see that the viands are sufficient for two, goes down, lamp in hand, to his cellar for a bottle of wine. Returning speedily therewith, he shows so cheerful a face, that one must come to the conclusion he has either found his lost spirits on the way, or shut up in the cellar with the sparkling wine and, after drawing his chair up to the table, and cordially inviting his clerk to do the same, they fall to with an appetite.

Or, if Mr. Grewgious has begun without one, which might appear to be the case from his laying down at first, every few minutes, his knife and fork, to say pathetically, "I really had a mother, you know!" he soon

realises the verity of the French proverb, to the effect, that appetite comes while eating; and, growing quite lively, he, assisted by his clerk, has soon so completely disposed of the chicken, ham and salad, that even a hungry dog might have scorned the very bones.

Having done this, and finally made trial of the thumb-nail experiment with the bottle of wine, with the satisfactory result that that, too, will not yield a single drop more, he grows, in emulation of his predecessor of seventeen forty-seven, quite jocose.

Yet he begins his conversation with the statement which he has made so often during the course of the meal, though now with a jovial and humorous sense of the joke therein contained: "I really had a mother, you know!"

Again his clerk assures him that he has no doubt whatever as to the veracity of this assertion.

"And now," says Mr. Grewgious, in a lively tone—a strong contrast to his former depressed one—"now that I have got rid of myself, which had taken quite shameless possession of my mind, and which shows, without further proof, how eminently egotistical I am—I have room for you and your concerns; and, without wishing to alarm you,

which I should be deeply grieved to do, for all the responsibility of the step rests upon my shoulders, I am sadly afraid we have been and done it."

"Done what, sir?"

"Why, done for you! It is an agonizing thought for me—to put it mildly—who am the moving power and originator of the scheme, to be obliged to fear that such is the case; but if you put a man into a wasp's nest, it is opposed to reason to imagine that he will not be stung. There may be a remote chance in his favour, a possibility—if he remains as still as a *dead* mouse (Mr. G. introduces the dead as a tremendous emphasis)—that he will not. But even supposing a lively young man—which is a ridiculous supposition—to be able or willing to act that inanimate part, the chances are that he will. I should say, there are a hundred chances to one, that he will."

The clerk assures him that, if he alludes to his proposed sojourn at the Billickin's, he has no doubt whatever but that it will prove a highly desirable abode for him, and has no fear of anything unpleasant happening to him there; none at all.

"Ah, you cannot imagine," says Mr. Grewgious, with some envy, "how much I admired

you this evening. Your high courage, your wonderful tact, your almost supernatural ability for assimilating your sentiments to those expressed by that remarkable woman, struck me with wonder and admiration. For, being myself so astoundingly unfitted for dealing with that most wonderful sex, I feel a humble—and, I hope, pardonable—envy of those who can. And so you are really not afraid?”

“Not a bit of it.”

“The relief you afford me, by so saying,” continues the Collector of Rents, “is most surprising. That overwhelming assertion—for I really had a mother, you know—weighs upon me now with the lightness of a feather. Not towards *her*, but towards *you*, my conscience reproached me as putting myself in the light of never having had one—and I really had, you know!”

“And in venturing to compare,” he goes on, “the very superior boarding-house of that most remarkable (squeezing his head as if to squeeze out of it the right expression)—dare I say, female?—(Mr. Brandis supposes she belongs to that category), to a wasp’s nest, I do so, coupled with the assurance that I continue to entertain for her sentiments of the most profound respect, and of the highest

admiration. And in employing the word 'female,' I only wish to remark that it is because I am sure no male alive could be gifted with such a copious flow of words."

Mr. Brandis making no reply to this, though his employer waits for him to do so, the old man continues.

"On that memorable day, when I first made your acquaintance, and came into possession of a clerk whose sole failing, in my eyes, is that of wearing blue spectacles, although to my astonishment I have heard them greatly admired to-day—a striking proof how tastes differ—I had been overrun with gentlemen, whose reservoirs of words, if I may put it so, were full and running over. Yet put the best supplied gentleman of the lot, opposite that most remarkable female, and let 'em play upon one another, and I'll wager a hundred guineas that the man would be swamped in next to no time. Not to speak of myself, who am of that arid and sandy nature, that I should be washed away at the first rush, no man alive could stand against such an inundation. And if they want anything to back them up, which is not needed, I am sure, there are floods of tears always in reserve. Really, the amount of moisture which that very remarkable sex has

at its disposal, is, and always was, a perfect mystery to me."

The clerk seems to express, by a motion of his head, that it is a mystery to him too.

"When you spoke of the 'weaker sex,'" continues Mr. Grewgious, apostrophising contemptuously the supposed originator of the phrase, "you knew precious little in my opinion, about what you were talking. You bragged, no doubt, largely, about your superior strength, and your superior wisdom, and the greater amount of brain in your skull, and all sorts of rubbish, not to say, gammon. You danced, you woodenheaded puppet! on your little stage, with great admiration of yourself, and an astounding sense of your own importance and the great effect you were producing, and never dreamed that a woman behind, invisible to other eyes, and even to your own blinded ones, was pulling the wires which moved you here and there, and was the heart and soul and mainspring of your actions. I'll wager my head," says Mr. Grewgious, looking indignantly out of window, as if he had the imaginary culprit suspended there in mid air, "that no man alive, nor dead either, was ever more thoroughly henpecked than *you*. And just because you were, you brought in that hollow

phrase, as a balsam for your wounded self-esteem."

Suddenly becoming conscious that he is intruding into a sphere, for which he is eminently unfitted, viz. :—that of eloquence, the old man lets the culprit fall suddenly, and looking out apologetically upon the twinkling stars, subsides into silence.

They sit together some time after this without speaking. The clerk is always slow to utter words ; whether because he has nothing to say, or no gift of saying it, or is a full repository of secrets, to be kept close and tight, Mr. Grewgious cannot tell. More than ever a voiceless man, and an apathetic listener, for his monosyllabic replies are as often wide of the mark as near it, he sits now with his back to the lamp upon the table, and his face turned, so that not one ray from the lamps outside, or the shining stars can fall upon it, and it is therefore enveloped in darkness, and shrouded in densest gloom. Mr. Grewgious, contemplating him somewhat uneasily, cannot refrain, though he tries hard to do so, from wondering, with the same dread upon him which he has felt so often, as to whether the darkness only hides from his view, the now familiar face with the blue spectacles, or whether, if a sudden light were

cast upon him, some other face, awful to contemplate, terrible to look upon, would not be revealed. And, shuddering, he breaks the silence, which he can bear no longer.

“ I should be glad,” he says, addressing, not the imaginary calumniator of the fair sex, whom he has finally dismissed, but the young man at his side, “ I should be very glad if you could learn to look upon me as your friend. I am, of course, as entirely unfitted to occupy that position as any other, but as far as my limited capacities will allow me, I should wish to serve you. I do not invite your confidence. God forbid that I should try to ferret out the secrets of any man ; but if at any time your overburdened heart should seek a repository for some of the load oppressing it, I would beg to offer mine ; and if I know myself, and in this respect I think I do, though I would by no means assert it as a fact, knowledge of oneself being always rarely found, and I being the last man in the world to possess a virtue not common to the race—they would be as safe there, perhaps safer, than if confined to your own. I cannot but see, although the area of my vision is very limited, that you are often borne down and overwhelmed with inward trouble ; and, without further unnecessary words, I wish

to say that I am sorry for you, and will gladly help you if I can."

Oh, the groan of anguish from the tortured heart! Oh, the bitter, bitter sigh, which is the old man's only answer! Is that the reason, perhaps, why the twinkling stars, twinkle so madly, that his brain reels as he watches them? For a few succeeding minutes he is too occupied in contemplating this phenomenon to speak, but when the stars cease their wild dance, and resume their wonted positions, he raises his voice again. There is a quaver in it, not observable before, but that is of course attributable to this strange behaviour on the part of the stars, and can have no other origin.

"We all of us have something to bear," he says, "every one of us; and it is comfort to know that no human being stands alone in the path of suffering. If we are innocent of wrong, every blow under which we writhe, is directed by unerring wisdom and guided by love unutterable, for our eternal good. And if guilty," his voice sinks into a whisper, as his eyes turn towards the crouching figure, "what a mighty and all powerful solace to know, that One by our side full of yearning love towards us, is only waiting for us to lay our burden at His feet, to take it up, and die for our iniquity."

In the solemn silence which succeeds these words, only the throbbing heart of the great city outside is heard to beat, and the bright stars in the night heaven, shining softly down upon them, seem to whisper of peace attainable, sure and certain, if only rightly sought for. And something resembling peace falls like balm on the listener's suffering heart.

"I am an old and solitary man," pursues Mr. Grewgious, "old before my time, and solitary always; and there have been seasons, when in spite of the many blessings granted me, I have sinfully rebelled against my lot. Sinfully, for who am I, and what are my merits? that I should expect a happiness, rarely bestowed, and still more rarely merited! There were times long ago—ah me! long ago! when I dreamed of something different. I have spoken of a class of women whom I designate as females—though entertaining for them sentiments of the highest respect—there is another class whom, with all due deference to their bright namesakes in Heaven, I would call angels."

As he looks up again at the bright stars, and as they look back at him, calm and smiling, like angels' eyes, his hard voice breaks and softens.

"At a time of life—ah, many years ago!—

when another man of my age would have been young, but I was old always, I dreamed of such a one.

“I have dreamed,” he says, and his uncertain voice seems dreaming still, “of an angel form, sanctifying my home, and making it a Paradise. Of soft eyes, beaming upon me and all around, the purest light of love and truth. Of fair, white hands, weak for all else, but strong in love, to guide me forward upon the path to Heaven. Of energy aroused and wakened in myself, to have made me something different far to what I am, for her angel sake.

“I have dreamed,” he says, “of little images of her, with pattering, unsteady feet, making music in my home and heavenly melody in my heart. Of soft, tiny lips, upon my cheek; childish arms around my neck; little voices at my ear, calling me, Father.

“I have dreamed,” he says, “of a motive power within me, strong to overcome all obstacles. Of a road to fame, entered upon for love of wife and child, and trodden, sustained by thought of them, unto the end. Of dormant powers within me, quickened into magic life, by the hope of winning for them all that earth can yield. Of love for my fellow men, having birth in love of *her*, and

growing and strengthening ever, as *it* grew and strengthened."

His softened voice dies away into silence, and they hear again the mighty heart of the city beat loud and fast. And as if the beatings of their own private hearts were swallowed up and absorbed into that universal throb, so an overwhelming sense of their own insignificance and infinite littleness, compared to the great universe, falls upon them both.

But even as the clerk might have wondered if the thrilling voice which had spoken, were really that of his master; so any late comer-home to Staple Inn, looking in at the open window, and marking the change which the fitful starlight had worked in the unfinished face, might have marvelled at the unearthly beauty of the finish.

CHAPTER II.

TEMPTATIONS.

DAYLIGHT in Staple Inn, hot noon and evening, again and again; and in the office of P. J. T., always the silent clerk, poring over his books; struggling to banish from his memory that question, which he himself had once proposed, and which now every change of day and night, every variation of wind and weather, brought back to him, hourly, constantly—the question which he dared not answer, and strove to forget: “What good is my life to me, what good is my life to others?”

In the morning, when the sun rising, peered into his uncurtained attic window at the Billickin’s, mockingly taunting him with being a speck upon its brightness. When the dreary day lay before him, every hour of which would be devoted to trying to forget, and to realizing its impossibility. When every figure in his account books and every reckoning made, all presented to him the same problem, with a curious interest in its solution. When every kind word from the

master, who had so delicately invited his confidence, and who, of all men, was the last in whom he could confide, sunk upon his heart like molten lead. When even a casual glance from any stranger in the office could make his heart's current stand still. For everything about him, animate and inanimate, seemed to his excited imagination, to propound the same question and demand of him its answer.

And in the noontide, with his often untasted dinner pushed away in disgust. With the terrible sense upon him of being an outcast from his fellow men, and that they were uneasy in his presence. With the mad idea, growing daily, that he was dead, and ought to be dead, and had no right to mingle with the living. With the constant fear that some one entering, would penetrate his frail disguise, and, ruthlessly tearing it from him, proclaim his secret to the world.

And in the evening; his work done for that day—his work, the only chance, poor as it was, left him to forget. In the evening restlessly pacing the busy streets, the while, his poor brain, worn out in one direction, rose up on the other, like a strong giant refreshed, to howl in his ears incessantly—never satisfied, never appeased—the same cruel question, which he could not answer.

And in the night season, when the world found rest, and he, from whom sleep fled aghast, alone watched and waited. When the storm wind lashed his window-pane as unmercilessly as if it were his own uncovered heart, and shrieked unerringly the same refrain. When the rain splashed upon the tiles above his head; sobbingly, in its slow torture, pointing out the fatal end. When the horror, which oppressed him night and day, grew strongest, that his mind was giving way under his sufferings, and that in the madhouse, yawning for its prey, his idiotic lips would blab out the secret, it would be worse than death to utter. When he pressed his hot forehead against the window pane, moodily watching the lightning darting through the angry sky, and wondering if God could not send one deadly bolt for such as he. The while the vivid light seemed to be painting in letters of fire, from one horizon to the other, that fatal question, which he feared to answer, knowing that if he did all hope was gone.

Sometimes, when his agony was greatest, he would remember the river, the cool, softly flowing river, and would fancy that an end to all his sufferings might be found there. He would stand upon the brink, looking down

into its dark depths, with an intense longing for the forgetfulness—the everlasting death of thought, which was his only hope of happiness.

And each time when he turned away with despair gnawing at his vitals, it was not the fear of death, but the fear of being brought back to life again, which prevented his making the terrible experiment. For had not he been cast into the jaws of death twice before, and had not even death rejected him, and cast him forth again. Worse far than death, bitterer far than dissolution, was this death in life—this living, when to all intents and purposes he was dead; when the grave had set its seal upon him, and the living knew him no more!

He was standing one evening, as he often stood after leaving the office, upon one of the many bridges spanning the dark river, and looking, as he often looked, into the turbid depths below. It was raining heavily, but he felt it not. It was cold, but he was feverish hot, for burning more fiercely than ever was the desire within him to try once more to lay down the burden which he could bear no longer—the burden of a worthless life—when a heavy hand, hard and rough from labour, grasped him by the shoulder.

He turned, while a cold sweat, like that of death, broke out upon him, for he feared, as he always did fear by any meeting, that the moment was come, which he would have died a hundred times to avert—the moment of discovery. But the face looking at him was perfectly unknown to him. It was a plain face enough—shaggy eyebrows, rough, uncultivated beard, and only the divine light of compassion in the earnest eyes made it noticeable. It was the face and figure of a common bricklayer, with his tools still in his hand, and his smock soiled with labour. His lips were firmly compressed to hide their trembling, and though he uttered no word, his strong grasp and earnest eyes spoke so plainly that the young man answered them.

“Why do you pity me?”

“O, not that, not that!” answered a husky voice, toneless and discordant from the effort which the owner was making to keep back some strong inward emotion agitating him. “For God’s sake! not that.”

“Not what?”

“Not that look at the river! Not that look at the cruel, rushing river! I know full well what that means. For why? For because of my having looked at it in the same way myself. The best reason in the

world, mate, and none better for knowing what it says."

Letting his tools fall, the bricklayer stretched out both his rough workman's hands, and taking those of the young man, led him from the brink.

"Oh, Lord, to think as I should ha' took this way home to-night, as is full a quarter-of-an-hour further round, and for no reason whatsomdever as I knowed on. To think, by the Lord's mercy, that I should ha' come in time to lay my hand upon him, and to turn him back; even as *she*, with her gentle touch upon my arm, turned me back at the last step upon the awful road which leads direct to hell."

Trembling and astonished, too exhausted to resist, and too hopeless to heed much what happened to him, the young man suffered his companion to do with him what he would, and followed him as mechanically as in a dream.

"Down upon your knees, man, here in this corner, where no one can see us, though 'twouldn't make no difference if they did, and repeat after me, for the salvation of your immortal soul, what I says."

Gently compelling him to kneel, and kneeling himself by his side upon the wet stones,

with the rain pouring on their uncovered heads, the bricklayer raised his voice in earnest prayer—

“Lord have mercy on us, and deliver us from evil”—Deliver us from evil! From evil thoughts and evil passions. From evil distrust and evil doubt. From the great power of evil always in our weakness at our side.

In no temple made with hands, but underneath His own heaven, the Great Physician laid His healing hand upon the bowed and broken heart. And with the touch, the bands were broken, and, mingling with the driving rain, the life-giving, life-restoring tears of penitence rushed forth.

The bricklayer let him weep a few moments undisturbed; then helped him to his feet again.

“There now; now you can’t do it, not if you try. But you won’t try no more; certain not, when you’ve heerd my story. I don’t know who you are, and I don’t want to know, if you don’t wish to tell me; but you shall go home along wi’ me to Mary, and have a bit o’ supper wi’ us, and while we are walking there, I’ll tell you my story. It ’ul turn away your thoughts from yourself a bit, mayhap, and can’t fail to do you good.”

Always holding him with his firm hand, as if he still half feared he might escape, the

bricklayer turned with him into a narrow, almost deserted street, where they could speak undisturbed.

“Some years ago,” he commenced, “things had gone very bad with me; as bad a’most as they could go. I had been ill, and my brain was dazed-like, and perhaps that was some excuse before God, for He judges us different to what our fellow-men does.

“Well, as I was a going to say, I had a mother, bedridden, poor soul! with the rheumatics, and whom I had supported—and proud I was to do it—ever since my father died. But when I fell ill, I lost my employment, and when I got better, ’twas to find another man stept into my shoes, and that there was no more work for me at all.

“’Tis a long story, but Mary is waiting for me, bless her! and I must make it short. ’Tis a sad story, for—don’t shrink from me!—I could not see my mother suffer, and the devil tempted me—an easy task when one is starving, and when those we love are starving—and I put out my guilty hand to take up other people’s gold. Yes, ’tis a thief who is a taking you to his home—though, as I thinks sometimes, never a thief of God’s making, but of man’s, for we couldn’t have been meant to starve anyhow, and there ought to have

been some help for us—a thief, who knows what the inside of a prison is like. What's the good of talkin' about misery! What's the good of bringin' up despair! before the judges, who never felt it, and the fine folk who talks about it, and writes about it, and knows no more what it is than the babby on my Mary's breast. *You* knows what it is, for I see it in your face as you stood by yon river, and them as has felt it knows the signs and tokens of it.

“I had only a short punishment: my former good character was brought up in my favour. But it was long enough for me to be prison-tainted, and I would gladly have suffered twenty times as much, if it could have been hidden from the world. That was the poison in the sting of it! When they let me out, I hid myself away from the sight of all men, till the dark night came, and then I went home.

“Went home! to find my mother dead—dead of grief and want. Went home! to find the house door locked, and me a cast-away upon the threshold. Went home! to find that I was homeless, desolate, abandoned and lost; and that there was no one in the world to say one kind word to me any more, or give me one friendly look.”

The husky voice had grown huskier as he spoke, and here the bricklayer loosened his hold of the young man, to brush his worn sleeve, soiled from labour, across his eyes. But his companion made no effort to escape, and went on quietly at his side.

“I set off for Lunnan that night,” he continued, when he had recovered his self-possession. “Hungry, thirsty, cursing God and cursing my fate, I shook off the dust of my native town—I was bred down in Yorkshire—and went up to Lunnan. But I found no streets paved with gold, even there. I found no work to do, even in the great city; them as had work to give reserved it for honest men, and not for such as me, with that blot upon his name. And so it come to pass that one evening I found myself standing by the lonely river, looking down into its depths—God forgive us both!—as you did just now.

“I calls it the lonely river, though, just as always, there was crowds of people going by, backwards and forwards, all the time I stood there. But I might have been invisible to all eyes, for no one looked in pity at the footsore wanderer; no mild eye softened in compassion for my misery. Passing to and fro, crowding and jostling one another, pushing me aside, or a going round me as if

I had been a stick or a stone, a post or a anything whatever, rather than a human being trembling on the verge of a deadly sin, went the thronging multitude. I had been looking out for some relenting face, some human pity for my suffering; for some one to ask for a trifle, enough to fill my hungry stomach, and to find me a poor lodging for the night; for the morrow might bring hope along with it—might bring work. But I shrunk back from the refusal I saw written on every face which passed, and so it was that the thought which had been growing in me—God knows how long!—ripened to the deed.”

“But you were saved, you were saved!” cried the listener, his face flushed with sympathy; forgetting his own sufferings, forgetting everything but his interest in the story; “oh, tell me how!”

“Ah, I knew it would do you good, my story would,” said the man, with a smile. “Them who has been through it knows best how to cure it. There’s nothing like knowing that another has been in the same strait, and has come through it to thank the Lord daily, on his bended knees, for having saved him. Nothing like knowing that another’s heart is full of pity for us; pity which can understand. And if you are hungry—”

“ But I am not,” interrupted the listener, “ it is not that.”

“ Ah, I thought not,” said the bricklayer. “ I see it wasn’t that with you, or we’d ha had a bit and sup in the first shop we come to, and never waited to go home. I know how hunger pinches. But I’ve nearly finished.

“ I was just making ready for the plunge ; the river was running fierce and rapid, swollen with heavy rains, and I knew as they couldn’t save me and bring me back again, against my will, to life, to let me die. I was hungry—starving—for I had eaten nothing that day, and next to nothing the day before, and the dead have no need of victuals. I was footsore and weary—no bed of down could be softer than the soft water, no music lull me more surely to repose. I was homeless—what matter ! I should find a cheap lodging for ever in the turbid water. And the roaring wind could, and would, no doubt—and do it famous, too—howl my solitary dirge. I was mad, in short, and all these things, and many others, rose to my fevered brain and made it reel again.”

Pausing to wipe the perspiration from his face, for he had been speaking quickly and in an agitated manner, and with a rough elo-

quence, which made his narration all the more impressive, as if he were going through the whole again, and in imagination were still standing on the spot from which he had been rescued, the bricklayer lifted his cap reverently, and stood bareheaded to the night sky.

“Just at that moment, when God seemed powerless, and the whole creation unable to save me, one gentle touch on my arm did it all. It was a touch so slight that at another time I might hardly have felt it; but then, on the verge of eternity, it thrilled me through heart and soul, and made me falter. I looked round. A slight, spare girl was standing at my elbow, with her thin, pale face raised beseechingly to mine. She was trembling from head to foot, and her mouth, slightly opened, was convulsed, as if she would have spoken, but could not.

“But her look, her agitated face, her clasped hands, spoke a language as I understand, ah, full well!

“Then she put her hand into the pocket of her scanty dress, and drawing out a small coin, placed it in my hand. I have the poor, battered sixpence now with a love-hole bored through it, and wouldn't part wi' it—no, not for a hunderd pound in gold.

“Oh, my lad ! only God knows what that touch did for me. I sank down on the wet bridge upon my knees, and grovelled on the ground before her feet. I wept and sobbed as I had never done before in all my life, and as my tears gushed forth, I felt as if the cruel hand of the devil, which had been gripping at my heart, loosened its murderous hold and let me free. I felt no hunger neither, only weak and faint ; but thankful, oh, so thankful, to my God and to His instrument—weak and yet so strong—for having saved me !”

“And what happened next ?” said the young man eagerly, as the bricklayer paused again.

“I fancy I must have swooned. The bridge seemed to go round with me, and a great darkness fell upon me, in which I only saw her young, pitying face. But when I came to myself again there was a crowd collected round us, and great confusion and alarm. Compassionate eyes looked at me ; after all there were kind hearts among the multitude. Money was collected for me on the spot ; and one—God bless him for a noble gentleman !—did more than that. He had me taken to a comfortable lodging for the night, and the next day he came and heard my

story and found for me all I wanted—honest work to do. Since that time I've worked hard, and worked glad, but never known want more."

"And that is all?"

"Not quite all," answered the man, with a radiant face. "Just come a step or two further with me; down this street, round the corner, and up the next, and you shall see."

And hurrying him forward, the bricklayer conducted him into a quiet street, with small, but decent houses, and pointed out one window, where the shutters were unclosed, and where a soft, bright light, shone steady like a star.

"Softly, softly! Don't let them hear us, and we'll peep in on them unawares." And he led him to a spot where they could look into a tiny kitchen, without being seen themselves by the inmates of it.

O, happy England!—where such homes are to be counted, not by tens, but by hundreds of thousands!—happier far, in countless possession of such homes as these, than in any other blessing—learn that thy palaces and stately courts, thy mansions of the rich and great are as nothing in comparison to them; learn to increase and multiply them on every side, so that in the years to come, thou

mayst attain a place among the nations, higher, nobler far than any other, and never to be won by any feat of arms.

A tiny room, scantily furnished, but bright with lamp and firelight! A dainty room, carefully swept and free from dust; and the few simple articles of furniture so brightly polished, from the unstinted use of that all-powerful mixture, which good housewives titulate "elbow-grease," that the fire and lamp-light reflect themselves on every side! A cozy room, with a little round table, covered with a clean cloth, drawn up in front of the fire, and loaded with a huge loaf of bread; a pat of butter; some broiled herrings, cunningly concealed between two hot plates, but disclosing themselves and giving indubitable tokens of their presence by a most appetising scent, which not only filled the little room, but floated out into the street; a pot of foaming porter; and a teapot "drawing" on the hob.

A glorious room; for a young mother sat there waiting, with a sleeping baby in her arms; while a round and rosy urchin, glowing from the evening bath, already airily attired for the night, and scorning bed, clamorously demanded permission to stay up and wait for daddy.

A glorious room, where all defects were filled up with love and happiness !

Had the young mother heard them ? She turned her expectant face towards the window, and bent her pretty head to listen.

Then she laid her sleeping babe in its cot, and rose, her face lighted up with joyful expectation, to open the door.

The child turned topsy-turvy with delight, kicking up his rosy heels in triumph, as he shrieked, "Daddy's tumming ;" and the bricklayer spoke to his companion in a voice over which he had no command whatever.

"That's the end, my lad ! That pale girl, who gave me the worn-out sixpence with the love-token, which she had always kept till then for luck, is my Mary there—my precious wife ! and them bairns—only think of that, my lad !—them bairns is mine !"

The young man saw the door open ; saw the sweet face of the young wife, shining with a love almost divine ; saw the shaggy beard brush her soft cheek ; heard the rapturous meeting of the lips.

But when the bricklayer, raising his face again, said—

"I have brought a friend, Mary," the young man was gone.

"I could have wished," said the honest

workman, thoughtfully, an hour later, smoking his pipe before the fading fire, with the soft breathing of his sleeping children at his ear and his Mary by his side, "I could ha' wished to have shown him, as I meant more than words; but never mind! I don't think he'll want to try that no more; he can't do it, after having heerd my story, and seen its glorious end."

CHAPTER III.

THE PLACE IS HAUNTED !

A STRANGE rumour has sprung up in Cloisterham, (always, by-the-by, a fruitful and well prepared bed for such a growth, by reason of its chronic drowsiness) and has developed itself with such amazing rapidity, that it has become, as it were, a stately tree, overshadowing the whole community, before any one has thought of attacking its young life, and nipping it in the bud. A sort of Upas tree, diffusing sickly vapours all around; destroying every plant of healthier growth in its vicinity; and not only overwhelming Cloisterham, but extending beyond the confines of that ancient city, and tainting with its poisonous breath, the country for miles on every side. Passers through the town suck in the poison on the road there, and becoming deeply and mortally affected during the transit, carry it out with them far beyond. Swarthy labourers, housing the golden harvest, relate it to new comers, with loud guffaws of disbelief in the burning sunshine; but huddle together when the evening comes,

like a flock of sheep, and not one would risk, on any account, being left alone in the solitary field, where the harvest moon is shining. Errant schoolboys, heedless of the master's threatening rod, linger behind in shady lanes, to whisper it into the ears of their fellows, round-eyed and open-mouthed, with wonder. Old wives, and young maids; old maids and young wives, forget old heartburnings, and cackle about it over a friendly cup of tea, with weird delight in its horrors, as only the much maligned female sex *can* cackle. Sturdy citizens of Cloisterham, foaming over with it in emulation of their foaming beer, gather together in cozy bar-rooms, and, drinking an extra pot or two, to give it seasoning, confide to each other their various informations concerning it; then stagger home at midnight, irate and out of pocket, to scold their expectant wives for having chattered about the same thing at home, and finally go heavily to bed, to dream mayhap, in remembrance of their late waking propensity, of *two* ghosts instead of one.

For it is a ghost which troubles Cloisterham. A ghost raised up, no one knows by whose agency, and refusing with the tenacity of a shadow, to be laid again. "The place is haunted!"

Not by long dead monk or nun, committed "dust to dust and ashes to ashes," centuries ago, and putting itself together, God knows how! with most unpardonable self-conceit, in order to present itself to public scrutiny, when its time for being taken notice of, and of taking notice, is past long years before. Not by any of the "old uns:" far too wise now, to meddle with the often dirty affairs of mortals, with which they soiled their fingers, in the times when they were, they rest peacefully in their coffins under the vaults, until pitched into by Durdles or his satellites, then turn to dust without a moment's notice, or a moment's inclination to resist their fate. Shrinking from public notice, instead of courting it, they sleep a dreamless sleep in their prison houses, and enjoy deep unconscious rest after their short span of life; rest from toil and care; rest from fierce passions and ambitions; rest from cruel oppression of their fellow men; rest from crimes unrevealed, and which only the last great day will bring to light. And till that summons comes, they sleep undisturbed and undisturbing, leaving their successors to live out their little day, until their night comes too, as they did before them.

Who is it then, who haunts Cloisterham? Rumour can tell you, for Rumour knows all about it; gets entangled sometimes in the fullness of its information; running risk of tripping up, or being tripped up, like a naughty boy, telling a story. Rumour can tell you that a female, tall, sepulchral-looking—most natural for one, who spends her day time in a sepulchre—clothed in white—(of course! what ghost would appear in a black garment! its object being to be seen, one would suppose, or why turn out at all? and clothing of a sombre hue, being undiscernible by mortal vision in the dead of night. And a ghost who should presume, contrary to all precedent, to appear at any other time, would be “cut,” as sure as fate)—in white therefore, and in flowing garments; in short, with every indispensable to make it thoroughbred and indisputably legitimate; and always on view at midnight in the churchyard, or in the Cathedral, “a singing ghostly songs,” or in the vaults, “screeching like an out-and-outer,” or stalking about Cloisterham on particularly dark nights. (By-the-by, why does a ghost always stalk? No matter whether, when clothed in mortality, it tramped, or waddled, or glided, or performed any other variation in

the poetry of motion, it always, and that's the puzzle, *stalks* afterwards.) Rumour has seen it often, as plain as plain, nay much plainer. Rumour has heard it wailing, like ten thousand horrors, in the Cathedral. What, you don't believe it? You pucker up your lips, and wrinkle your nose, and shake your head, making a perfect fright of yourself, and proclaim the whole affair, bosh and nonsense! Go with Rumour, between twelve and two o'clock at night, through the churchyard, when the wind is rising, and mark, if you don't hear it then! But as nobody does go, and wouldn't have gone for the world, not even you! Rumour has it all its own way, and makes the most of it. Bless you, it grows fat and hale upon it. It even whispers in everybody's ear—for it has ferretted out the secret, and knows all about it—who it is who makes these nightly rounds. No body is to tell anybody else on any account whatever; which isn't in the least necessary, for Rumour takes precious good care to perform that office itself, and lets every man, woman and child it can get at, into its confidence. Listen! Bend your head! Be sure *you* don't tell! The reverential wife; the incomparable looker up; the late Mrs. Sapsea!

There now, isn't that a stunner ! Did you ever ? No, you never ; of course you do ; they all never, one and all. Mrs. Tope even reports, that the Revd. Septimus Chrisparkle, Minor Canon in Cloisterham, on first receiving the startling information, made use of the same unæsthetical observation. But Mrs. Tope's excitement is so great, that she can hardly be looked upon in the light of an authentic witness, and having been losing her head, as she has pathetically declared to her lord and master, every hour of the last fortnight, may be supposed to have reached the culminating point at this present, and to have really lost it.

The very last person likely ! A woman, who had passed through life as a shadow, and gone off the stage through utter inability to act even that inanimate part any longer, could certainly not be expected to return of her own free will, and react it, for her own delectation ! A woman, even in life so faint and colourless, that her pupils had almost utterly ignored her, and, revelling in the extravagances prompted by their exuberant youth, had been wont to regard her faint remonstrances, and still fainter penalties, as of hardly any account whatever ! A woman, whom even her bereaved conjugal partner

had only chosen on account of her extreme humility and unparalleled capacity for looking up, without making even a step towards the contemplated level! And this woman, this nonentity, who died, apparently, because she hadn't strength of mind enough to live, should take it upon herself to raise up all this commotion, and to intrude her indifferent charms into a sphere which had thrust her out for ever, and to which she had no manner of right to return! If Rumour hadn't been absolutely certain of the fact, it would have seemed an impossibility.

But stay! There are reasons for not being able to remain quiet in the grave, made out and fully established long ago as unanswerable ones, to which even a departed spirit must submit, and which may be strong enough to compel it to return, willing or unwilling, to the scenes of its former sins or sorrows; either to do penance on earth, for crimes committed there, or to reveal to mortals the mystery of crimes perpetrated on itself, and which they must avenge. Is it one of these reasons, or is it any other, that is influencing the late Mrs. Sapsea?

Or is it her modesty, perhaps, which is the cause of her restlessness? Does that high-

sounding epitaph, attracting so much of public attention, appeal to her sense of her deficiencies, and, disturbing her rest, even in the tomb, drive her forth to wander. Or is the contradictory spirit of her sex aroused, even at this late period, prompting her *because* she had enjoyed so little of popular attention during her lifetime, to determine to possess it afterwards. Who can decide between these conjectures? Not muddle-headed Cloisterham! Not many-tongued Rumour, who proposes a new solution every day. And this is the great point now under consideration; for as to the *fact* of her reappearance, Rumour is considered, on all hands, to have proved that beyond a doubt.

Two people in Cloisterham at this time, next to the ghost, absorb the greater part of popular attention—the stonemason, Durdles, and his stoner-in-chief, the ragged Deputy. The latter, indeed, is so in vogue, that he might have eclipsed even Rumour, were it not that that vague individual, finding his reputation in danger, cunningly makes a league with his rival, and unites his powers to his, till they become almost inseparable. A jolly time of it has Deputy, straddling rampant in the tap-room of various public-houses—“none of your low sort, either,” but

in houses of undoubted respectability, where, in the times that are past, he would have been regaled with nothing better than the taste of a rope's end—but where now he is sumptuously accommodated, gratis, with pots of foaming beer or porter, glasses hot as hot of stiff brandy and water, or any other fragrant mixture handy; the while he draws on his imagination, inflamed with drink, for the benefit of a trembling, yet delighted audience, to such unlimited extent, that sensitive females faint with horror, strong men stagger, old granddams and grannies turn up the whites of their eyes (or, rather, yellows), and gape like dying fish—though with delighted satisfaction that such things still happen in their generation—and harassed mothers' brawny arms ache again from smacking their refractory offspring, who *will* listen behind doors and under tables; go into fits at the prospect of bed, with ghosts in every corner; and, when consigned there by bodily force, wail incessantly, until the wails are turned into howls of anguish, under the maternal fist.

No matter that the tale repeated undergoes so many and such astonishing variations that the original narration must have been a pure invention, demoralised Cloisterham always

has ready for the newest account the most profound belief, and no supper can be partaken of without a plentiful seasoning of this piquant sauce.

As for Deputy, he has fully made up his mind, in the event of such a dreadful calamity occurring as this ghost being laid, to raise up a private one of his own as speedily as possible, completely convinced that no other investment of any sort whatever could yield him such enormous and perfect safe returns.

Durdles is, perhaps, though in a different way, quite as interesting an object in the eyes of Cloisterham as his faithless retainer. He is a hundred times more mysterious, and suffers, by reason of boundless popularity, in very much the same way as other great people whose renown capricious Fame—deserved or undeserved—has sounded upon her mighty trumpet.

He is invariably attended by an admiring crowd, who gaze rapturously at him eating his dinner upon a tombstone; tread upon his heels as he staggers through Cloisterham; yell outside his dwelling, the while he is engaged within in that mysterious process of “cleaning himself,” which is attended by no visible result; and even dodge his footsteps to the dreaded vaults, where he retires some-

times, as a monarch might retire when the adulation of his loyal subjects becomes oppressive. Dozens of ragged urchins clamorously make applications for the post vacated by the faithless Deputy, and express their willingness to stone him to any amount whatever for even less than the proverbial song.

As for phlegmatic Durdles, he accepts this sudden and full-blown popularity with the same indifference with which he will lose it when it goes; and, provided with a heavy stick to keep intruders from too close contact with his person, swills his beer and bolts his dinner in exactly the same space of time as is his wont, allowing all curious gazers to enjoy this sublime spectacle with a perfect nonchalance all his own.

In one respect, however, Deputy is much better off than the stonemason. Thrifty landladies discover after a while that no amount of beer, although freely accepted and partaken of, can oil the mouth of this latter worthy, or induce him to go beyond his original communication, that "Durdles knowed what he knowed; and Durdles could speak if he would; and if folk wouldn't heed folk, they hadn't no right to wonder if folk bothered 'em."

This remark, though possessing all the high

qualities of an oracle, or a Sphinx's riddle, and admitting of almost any construction whatever, loses gradually, by dint of repetition, the charm of novelty; and the landladies relax in their attentions, contenting themselves with rushing to the door whenever he passes with his numerous retinue, and wondering pensively, as they contemplate him, what sort of a charnel house of delicious horrors his dusty coat and waistcoat cover up.

Of course, Miss Twinkleton's young ladies know all about it. In the immediate vicinity of the house, where the ghostly visitant is supposed to spend the greater part of the night-season—probably feeling more at home there than anywhere else—they have caught the infection as soon almost as it broke out, and are now in the hottest fever of the malady. No measles, nor scarlatina, nor any other of those evils to which youth is subject, could have run through the school with more unerring certainty, striking at all and each in turn, than have these ghostly news.

The housemaid has been dismissed at a moment's notice, without character, on account of being found *in flagranti* repeating Deputy's last narration to a delighted, though shivering, audience of young ladies in their nightgowns, with their pretty feet bare, upon the landing.

The cook has been summoned to private audiences, and received severe reprimands on the same account, only avoiding the fate of her fellow because her place is more difficult to refill.

The boy who cleans the boots has been discovered neglecting that duty to disgorge himself of the fearful tales with which he is stuffed, chock full, and receives a piece of her mind from Mrs. Tisher, as a powerful corrective.

Miss Ferdinand, whose lively imagination might have attracted for her in the town an audience only second to that of Deputy, and who enjoys, in the retirement of the Nuns' House, a dangerous popularity for that reason, is so oppressed by heavy and continual penalties, on account of her inventive genius, of copying out "*La Fontaine*," that she confides to nine-tenths of her fellow-pupils her unalterable determination to induce her brother—intended for a soldier, and at present in bibs and under discipline—to utterly annihilate, and do away from the surface of the earth, that corrupted nation the French, whose barbarous language was invented, she feels sure, for the special torture of British school girls.

Miss Giggles, on the other hand, who has

no imagination at all to speak of, but who can, and does, on any occasion whatever, fall into convulsions of her own name, and who would quite as lief shake her plump sides over ghosts as anything else, comes in for so much public ignominy through too free exercise of this faculty, at times and seasons when a sedate gravity would have been far more becoming, that she becomes false to her own nature, and, with tears in her eyes, implores her friends to retitulate her; the immense incongruity of being called Giggles, when she is so constantly doing just the opposite, being apparent even to her own weak mind.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Miss Twinkleton—who, from her high desk in the “apartment allotted to study,” has delivered harangues which, for elegance of grammatical construction, may be said to be unrivalled, and which prove to a mathematical certainty that no ghosts ever had appeared to mortals, or ever could, without producing any effect on the young ladies’ illogical minds, who unanimously refuse to accept any theory whatever, destructive to their firm belief in this ghost, to which they cling with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause—it is no wonder, therefore, that Miss Twinkleton, descending from her pinnacle into her own

private apartment, should confide to the matronly bosom of Mrs. Tisher that she is at her "wits' end."

Even the Deanery has been visited by the prevailing epidemic. Floating upward from the lower regions, to which it has found ready access, it ascends to the morning-room, where the Dean, Mrs. Dean, and the Deanly daughter discuss it at their breakfast table.

Mrs. Dean, a robust, hearty, rosy English-woman, with an unmistakable appearance of having always lived upon the fat of the land, is inclined to be a little severe upon the question. Mrs. Dean is sometimes a little severe in theory, though—good-natured soul!—lenient enough in practice. Mrs. Dean has finished her breakfast—a hearty one—and is in a serene state of mind, which wouldn't harm a fly, but, nevertheless, her tone is severe as she says—

"My dear, it must be put down."

The Dean is engaged in disposing of a partridge pie—the first of the season—and is picking the bones thereof with hearty relish.

He slowly finishes it, as his wife speaks, sucks his fingers (really does! would you have believed it of a dean?) wipes them upon the napkin tucked under his chin, takes a long draught of coffee, clears his throat,

looks at the waiting Mrs. Dean, as if about to speak, thinks better of it, and blows his nose instead.

He is still blowing it, making much more noise than is necessary, and lengthening the operation in a most aggravating manner, much as he lengthens out his remarks through repetition, when Miss Dean, who has been fidgetting about on her seat for some minutes, interposes.

Miss Dean is the only one left behind of a numerous flock who had been fledged in the Deanery, and, one after another, spread their wings and flown out into the world.

Miss Dean would have had no objection—quite the contrary—to doing the same in her turn, but her wings, as female aristocratic ones, are too weak to carry her alone, and no one has appeared, willing to support her.

Miss Dean has stated her age as twenty-five, for some years past—for more years than she likes to think of, and though well preserved, without stint of sugar, and therefore keeping her taste for some time longer than is usual, is gradually turning sour. She is not nearly so handsome as her mother, and although she has also always lived upon the fat of the land, has not appropriated it into her person as her maternal ancestor has done.

Her nose is rather long and rather sharp, and, at dinner time, rather red. Her hair is very abundant at the back, though thin upon the temples.

Her voice is sharp, too, and so are her elbows, which protrude themselves rather too demonstratively out of the wide open sleeves of her muslin dress.

She speaks in a tone decidedly severe, without compromise; a strong contrast to her mother's unctuous one, as she says—

“Mama is quite right, papa, it must be put down.”

The Dean clears his throat again, deliberately takes off his napkin, folds it carefully together, and lays it upon the table, patting it two or three times benevolently; then addresses his wife.

“Darling,” he begins (he always has called his wife “Darling” ever since he wooed her, a bonny lassie; and never has used this term of endearment for any of his blooming boys and girls) “in this respect we all agree with you, that it must and ought to be put down, put down. But,” he continues, after a moment's hesitation, “the difficulty is, how to do it, how to do it. For the present it appears that the more we try, the more it baffles us, and rises up again.”

Miss Dean tosses her head very much indeed, at this, and says "she would know the reason why."

"Do you think you would, my love?" he replies, with bland reproof. "Then we must send you out to make enquiries, for *we* (he well knows the importance of that *we*, and repeats it with complacency) We acknowledge our inability yet to answer that question, and want to, want to."

The Dean knows full well how to rule in his own house, and is undoubted master there, so Miss Dean hangs her head abashed, and pouts—she oughtn't to have done that, for her lips are thin and long, and not made for pouting—as she answers—

"I didn't mean that, papa; of course, I know that it isn't likely that I, a silly, ignorant girl, can answer any question which puzzles you; but I fancy those boys are at the bottom of it all, and that perhaps if our parish schoolmaster showed a little more energy, and made examples of the ringleaders, the whole thing would die out."

"As Christians," says the Dean, with still that shade of disapproval in his tone, "and occupying a prominent position in the Christian Church, it behoves us to judge our fellow-men with all due charitableness. I have every

reason to believe, and I draw my information from Mr. Chrisparkle, whom I requested to enquire into it, that our good schoolmaster has been doing his utmost to quell this scandal; he assures us that he has been making an example of every boy in the school in turn, and is quite worn out with the exertion. Only yesterday he sent in a humble request for a new supply of canes, the old ones being so split and frayed as to make a mere mockery of punishment."

Even Miss Dean waxes silent as she hears of this unlimited flagellation, and her good-natured mother ventures to express some pity for the luckless victims.

"It is a painful necessity, Darling," says his reverence, "and much to be deplored, much to be deplored. I am myself always in favour, when probate, of mild measures, mild ones. I said the same to Mr. Chrisparkle yesterday, when he submitted with deference—shall I say, to my more extensive experience," says the Dean, with dignified condescension, (No one venturing to suggest any other form of words, he says it, and goes on again)—"the question, as to whether the schoolmaster, actuated by too inconsiderate ardour, was not rather over doing it?"

“That’s just what I think,” interrupts Mrs. Dean, her bright cheeks taking a deeper hue, and her capacious, motherly bosom agitated with indignation. “It’s a sin and a shame to make the poor laddies suffer for the whole community, for, after all, they only repeat, like little parrots, what they hear.”

“*Darling*,” says the Dean. From the so frequent use of this word he has brought to great perfection the art of modulating it, so as to make it an outlet for any feeling whatever.

He has never, during the whole of their married life, given expression to any reproof or anger towards his wife than could be conveyed into this gentle word. But now, her eyes droop beneath his, as he utters it, and the colour fades slowly out of her cheeks.

“Oh, you warm-hearted and loving women!” continues his Reverence—he has administered the reproof, inflicted the chastisement, and his heart yearns tenderly towards her, who is the pride of his life—“beautifiers of our hard lives, and whom we dearly love and cherish! But we mustn’t let you rule,” says the Dean, smiling, “your charming impulses run away with your judgment in every case where a judicious severity is necessary. Dear me!” says the Dean,

laughing outright, "it is an ill-managed world enough in *our* hands; but what tremendous confusion would be the result if we let our darlings rule!"

Mrs. Dean may have thought that the wisdom of "our" proceedings still remained to be proved, concerning the question under discussion, but she wisely holds her tongue.

"I represented to Mr. Chrisparkle," continues his Reverence, with extreme self-satisfaction (never man knew better than the Dean how to rule his womankind; he has not uttered a harsh word, and yet they are both, figuratively, prostrate at his feet) "that I could not agree with him as to his half-expressed censure of the schoolmaster. That the insubordination in the school had attained such proportions as to render the most stringent measures absolutely unavoidable. And that I begged him to assure the schoolmaster of our moral support, and to see that he was provided with an unlimited supply of—shall I say, canes," says the Dean.

It being the only thing he meant to say, of course, he says it, and nobody contradicts him again.

Miss Dean even seems to favour the measure.

"I am bound to confess," continues his

Reverence, "that Mr. Chrisparkle, who is a most active and praiseworthy young man, and whom I have favoured with my particular confidence on more than one occasion, and whose prompt measure in dismissing from his house, on my advice, that ill-starred, ill-famed Indian youth, did him credit, seemed fully convinced by my words. He listened to them with profound attention, and preserved a modest silence. Indeed his own later communication so strikingly confirmed my views, as to admit of no further uncertainty on the subject. He says that lessons are at a standstill; the naughty boys and girls spell no word correctly that is not connected with ghost or spirit, and beginning their copybooks with a capital S, they always end with Sapsea."

"Don't you think," enquires Mrs. Dean, timidly, "that it might be of some use to enquire of the Mayor himself if he has any notion how this foolish story got into circulation? I mean, of course, if you consider it suitable," she adds humbly.

"We have thought of that, Darling. I have requested Mr. Chrisparkle to come up this evening and dine with me (the Dean is not proud, but he is serenely conscious what a privilege that is, and how fortunate Mr.

Chrisparkle may consider himself) and make me acquainted with the result of an interview he purposed holding with Mr. Sapsea."

And the Dean, who has sat out the time he allows himself for his digestion, breaks up the conference, kisses his wife, pats his daughter on the head, much as he patted his napkin, and retiring into his study, accompanied by a serene conscience and perfectly restored good humour, leaves the ladies to themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

SATISFACTORY AND UNSATISFACTORY VISITS.

MISS TWINKLETON at her "wits' end," and her stock of penalties exhausted, and the Dean full of deanly wisdom, with a strong-armed schoolmaster, unlimited as to canes, at his disposal, have come to the same conclusion after all, though by widely different roads, and resolve to apply to Mr. Sapsea as a last resource. The Dean has appointed Mr. Chrisparkle to act as his ambassador to that potentate, but Miss Twinkleton, having no great confidence in the strategical ability of her second in command, the weak-backed and somewhat weak-minded Mrs. Tisher, prefers to go herself. Her personal acquaintance with the Mayor is very slight, although they are such near neighbours. The rivalry which had existed between the departed, and now most troublesome spirit of his late wife, in her maiden state of existence, had cast its shadow over any intercourse between the two, which had naturally extended to the husband. But they are on bowing terms. The Mayor is always gracious enough to acknowledge

Miss Twinkleton's artistic inclination, by slightly touching the rim of his hat. And this condescension affords Miss T. so much satisfaction, that she has been observed, on one or two occasions, to go a good bit out of her way, to profit by it.

Miss Twinkleton is a rigid inculcator of the strictest etiquette, but concludes, after due consultation with Mrs. Tisher, that on so important an occasion, there would be no impropriety in her crossing the magisterial threshold. She makes, therefore, a very careful toilette, and occupies a full half-hour, under the auspices of Mrs. Tisher, in arranging, to the highest point of perfection, the folds of her Indian shawl. But she receives her friend's remark, intended as a joke, "that he is sure to be struck by her appearance," with considerable dudgeon, assuring her, with much more asperity than the occasion seems to warrant, that her heart (with a sigh) will never recover from the wound inflicted on it, by "foolish Mr. Porter," and (with a mournful shake of the head) will remain for ever impervious to any other arrow from the bow of the amorous god. Yet Mrs. Tisher, although she wisely holds her tongue, as is her prudent custom, when her superior "has the tantrums," as she elegantly expresses it,

is by no means cured of her belief that Miss Twinkleton would gladly enter the wedded state, with pretty much indifference as to who the other party in the bargain might be, so long as he was able to maintain her; and as to the young ladies, oh dear! *they* have settled the question long ago.

So Miss Twinkleton sallies forth, with a beating heart; leaving Miss Ferdinand to plot schemes for the destruction of the French, while copying out in a scrawling school-girl hand, and with frightful corruption of his language, the fables of the detested La Fontaine, and Miss Giggles sobbing in a corner; and taking her courage in both hands, rapidly ascends the steps of the Mayor's house. On arriving at the door, however, maidenly perturbation and modesty get the better of her, and for a good ten minutes, she bobs backwards and forwards in a state of uncertainty, no doubt painful to herself, but affording the most unspeakable delight to those fortunate young ladies who, having possessed themselves of the windows, commanding the Mayor's house, are watching her from behind the window curtains.

At last Miss Twinkleton, rising superior to this momentary weakness, gives, as is usual in such cases, no modest rap, but one

loud enough to wake the dead. Perhaps she fears she has accomplished this feat, for she starts back, pale and trembling, as a being, with a white bandage tied round its jaws, opens the door; and—on her own authority, stated emphatically, on her return, to Mrs. Tisher—her heart, disregarding all natural laws, rises into her mouth.

It is no ghost, however; no phantom of the departed Mrs. Sapsea, come to drive back her former rival; only a servant maid, with a bad toothache, and a still worse temper.

“Is your master at home?” inquires Miss Twinkleton, with her most bewitching smile. It ought to have softened the hard heart of the maid, but it does not.

“Yes, master were at home, but had giv’ orders as no visitors wasn’t to be let in.”

“Oh, pray, pray,” ejaculates Miss T., with ineffable sweetness, “tell him that Miss Twinkleton, from the Nuns’ House opposite, begs the favour of a few words with him on most important business, and will not detain him more than a few minutes.”

“When master’s giv’ his orders,” says the surly maid, “he means ’em to be kep. I can’t risk losin’ my place, which the wage is good, by goin’ agin ’em—and so go along with you.”

The maid does not utter these last words, but looks them so determinately, that Miss Twinkleton falters upon the door-mat, where she has taken up her stand.

Now, if at this critical moment, Miss Twinkleton had taken her departure, and there was no possibility of retarding it in decency any longer, the fulfilment of her destiny, which fate was writing at that moment in his books, might never have been accomplished. Yet, after all, this is only a sophism, for fate cannot err, and therefore Mr. Sapsea comes, in the very nick of time, as it was ordained he should, out of his dining-room, where he has been sitting.

The Mayor looks depressed and careworn, and a harassed, scared expression, most unusual to him, dims the self-complacency of his face. He starts as he sees Miss Twinkleton, and turns almost as pale as she had done.

"I told the lady, sir," says the housemaid, eyeing Miss T. with a reproachful glance, "as you'd giv' orders to let no wisitors in, and she—"

"Wouldn't go," concludes Miss Twinkleton, recovering her airy self-possession, and advancing a step to gain room for a profound obeisance, in the accomplishing of which she

comes out again upon the doorstep. "A thousand pardons, honoured sir, for intruding into a privacy which has a right to be respected, and which, I hope, on any less important occasion, I should be the last to disturb."

The Mayor has no hat on, but he touches his head with the tip of his forefinger instead, and motions her into his dining-room.

"If circumstances compel me to allude to a topic," begins Miss Twinkleton, from her seat on the sofa, much embarrassed at finding herself *vis-à-vis* with this solemn gentleman, "which at any other time, good sense and good feeling would prompt me to avoid, I must beg you to excuse me."

She raises her eyes timidly to his for a moment, as if seeking encouragement, but he gives none.

"Rumours and reports," she continues, somewhat cast down by his silence, but determined not to abandon the ground she has gained, "nearly concerning yourself, and of which you cannot be ignorant, are in active circulation in Cloisterham, and seriously affecting the morals of the community, of which you are the proved leader and guide."

The Mayor bows a solemn assent, for she pauses, as if awaiting a reply.

“These rumours,” she continues, “are of so absurd and ridiculous a nature, that they would have been regarded with contempt by the educated, and ignored until they faded into that air from which they sprung, but for their unhallowed influence upon the minds of the young.”

“Ve-ry true !” assents the Mayor.

“As an instructress of youth, a trainer up of youth in the way it should go,” says Miss Twinkleton, “it fills me with the deepest concern, to note the effect which these foolish stories have had upon the minds of my young ladies ; and although I have drawn the reins of discipline tighter than usual, and, in the case of Miss Giggles and Miss Ferdinand, put on the curb, I have not been able to quell the rising insubordination ; and unless you, sir, the chief magistrate, and—you really must permit me to say so !—a man of acknowledged wisdom and far-sightedness, will assist me with your counsel, I sadly fear that my young ladies will get beyond my control.”

The harassed expression clears away from the face of the Mayor, and the pompous one resumes its seat there. He begins to think that this is a woman of sound common sense and fine discernment. He begins to think that his lost partner had hardly done her

justice. He begins to think, viewing with complacency her clasped hands and upturned face, that there may be, in her, a large capacity for looking up, though undeveloped, and that he is the man to develop it.

“May I count upon your assistance,” says Miss Twinkleton, wiping away a tear, which is coursing down her aquiline nose, and perceiving with woman’s ready wit, that she is making by no means a disagreeable impression. “May I look to you to help me to put this scandal down?”

“My dear madam,” begins the Mayor, with ineffable pomposity, “if I say that you have come to the right source for assistance, I believe I do not go beyond the bounds of a modest self-confidence.”

“O, most certainly not!” (Miss Twinkleton hardly knows how to be emphatic enough.)

“If my knowledge of the world, and my capacity for dealing summarily with the lower classes, which I have attained through close study of them, is spoken favourably of in the town, it would be a puerile and sickly sentimentality to deny that it is with reason—an affectation of modesty unworthy of a man, and an Englishman.”

O, how he swells and dilates as he says it, seeming to fill up the dining-room with

his greatness! Miss Twinkleton is in raptures.

“And what I say,” he continues, “and what I shall maintain, in spite of drivelling objections and cankerous backbitings from imbeciles totally inadequate to the work, is, that supported by the majesty of the law, and armed with its utmost severity, we must put it down.”

If stringing together of high sounding words without meaning can do it, then Mr. Sapsea is indeed the right man in the right place. If unbounded self-conceit and empty-headedness can save Cloisterham, then Miss Twinkleton may return to the Nuns' House with a lightened heart. He utters the last words as if he had invented them, although Miss Twinkleton had made use of them only a moment before, and they are on the lips of every authority in the city.

“Have you any idea, honoured sir,” inquires Miss Twinkleton, “as to who may be the originator of the scandal? My assistant, Mrs. Tisher, has informed me that, in the town, two people are spoken of as being the principal propagators: the stonemason, Durdles, and a ragged urchin, who calls himself Deputy.”

“Ha, Durdles,” says the Mayor. “Exactly

so! With the utmost rigour of the law, Durdles must be put down."

"You believe, then, that he is the offender?"

"If you had not interrupted me, dear madam," says the Mayor, with dignity (Miss T. begs a thousand pardons for having done so, unintentionally), "you would have heard that my suspicions have long concentrated themselves on that drunken sot. The mind of man can hardly conceive it, but it is a fact that that creature even went the length of asserting to me, with a doggedheadiness which would listen to no reasoning, that my deceased wife's mortal remains were no longer in that coffin into which I saw them deposited. Even went the length of recommending to me the advisability of having the vault entered, and the coffin (a very handsome oak one, with a silver plate upon the lid—cost, quite a secondary consideration) opened. Need I say that I spurned him from me with contempt. Need I say that the key of the monument, through which the vault is accessible, is in my possession, and will remain there. Need I say that no power on earth should persuade me to submit to such a sacrilege, except at my own suggestion."

Miss Twinkleton assures him that he need

not. She is perfectly aghast at the audacity of the man. She hopes, though by no means vindictive, that he may suffer for it in prison ; and in that wholesome retirement, repent of his audacity in dust and ashes.

“Madam,” says the Mayor, “I shall commit him.”

Miss Twinkleton cannot express how much her heart is lightened. She had entered the house with the full conviction that if any man alive was equal to the emergency, his Honour was that man. She quits it with her highest expectations more than realised ; and is perfectly lost in astonishment at the subtlety of thought, the versatility of expression, the profoundness of intellect, combined in him, and which she has found to exceed even his high reputation. She will make no further apology for her intrusion, for she feels sure that one so overflowing with wisdom must be willing to bestow a portion of it on so ardent an admirer.

And so Miss Twinkleton rises to go ; and the Mayor graciously accompanies her to the door, giving her his hand at parting, and announcing, with the air of a benignant sovereign, that he shall take the liberty of looking in upon her in the course of a day or two, to let her know how things are getting “put down.”

Miss Twinkleton knows best why she returns so elated to the Nuns' House, but probably the *wisdom* of his Honour has very little to do with her satisfaction. She embraces Mrs. Tisher with an emotion which much surprises that respectable matron, and grants a full amnesty to those oppressed victims, Miss Ferdinand and Miss Giggles, on the spot. She even thinks of Mr. Grewgious without bitterness, and "foolish Mr. Porter" is all but forgotten. Perhaps, after all, the mischievous god has contrived, by subtle means of which he is undoubted master, to reach even her harnessed heart, and penetrate it with one of his arrows.

And if ever the ghost of Mrs. Sapsea had any occasion to re-visit the conjugal hearth, it might have done so with good reason that same evening; for Mr. Sapsea sits brooding, long after his usual hour of retiring for the night, in total forgetfulness of her whom he has lost; only seeing, in imagination, a face upturned to his, in which he has discovered a whole mine of capacity for looking up.

On the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Chrisparkle also pays the Mayor a visit, and remains closeted with him alone for some considerable time; but the interview does not seem to be followed by the same satisfactory result as that of Miss Twinkleton's. The

Minor Canon leaves the magisterial presence with a somewhat depressed expression of countenance, and a slow step, as if weary. But he does not go home yet. Passing through the High Street, he turns in the direction of the Parish School. It is pretty late in the afternoon, close upon the hour when the children are usually dismissed, but he hopes to arrive in time to intercept the schoolmaster. He finds, however, the whole school still assembled; six little boys are in attitudes indicative of acute bodily suffering; while a seventh is writhing under the hand of the infuriated schoolmaster. As the Minor Canon enters, the hubbub, caused by the cries and entreaties of the lad, the threats of the heated pedagogue, and the confusion among the scholars, lulls a little, and all eyes turn expectantly towards him. Even the schoolmaster pauses, with the cane in his uplifted hand.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” he says, while the lad upon whom he has been operating takes advantage of the opportunity to escape, “but they are at it again, worse than ever. Billy Jones there has been drawing a ghost upon his slate, instead of using those abilities which the Almighty gave him—not to be employed in inciting his companions to rebellion

and sin, but to work out a sum in compound subtraction, which still remains unsolved upon his slate, and which he will remain behind to copy out seven times after the others are dismissed, once for himself, and once for each of the boys whom he has misled." (This *to* the Minor Canon, but *at* Billy Jones, accompanied by a threatening action of the cane.) "And these others have been wasting their precious time, for every moment of which they must give account, and encouraging Billy in his wickedness, by looking over his shoulder, and giggling—giggling," repeats the schoolmaster, as if that were the height and depth of human depravity.

"Oh, Billy Jones, Billy Jones!" says the Minor Canon, sorrowfully, "I thought you were a good, clever boy, going to grow up a credit to the school and to Cloisterham, and with far too much sense to believe or repeat any such foolish stories, or try to make others do so. If you go on like this, I'm afraid we shall be obliged to send you away out of the school; and then what is to become of you, and what will your poor mother do?"

The kind tone of the Minor Canon, kinder, gentler far than his words, and his sorrowful glance at the reprobate, accomplish far more than the master's rod has done. Billy had

borne his punishment with the fortitude of a martyr, but now he puts his knuckles into the corners of his eyes, and sobs bitterly.

“O, don’t ’ee say that, sir! It raly ain’t me, sir! I wouldn’t go for to do it on no accounts. It ain’t likely as a chap would want to be whopped at ’ome and whopped at school, if he could help it, sir. A chap would rather sleep o’ nights than not close a hi for fear and trembling. And if I drawed it,” says Billy, raising his head to look defiantly at the schoolmaster, “it’s because what’s in a chap will come out somehows or others where it didn’t ought to. And I thinks and dreams o’ nothin’ else, sir,” and Billy stuffs his knuckles into his eyes again, with an appearance of the most heartfelt distress.

“Then who is the culprit?” asks the Minor Canon.

Billy is choked with his emotion, so the other answers for him.

“It’s Deputy, sir! It ain’t us at all, sir. Deputy tells us stories as makes a chap’s blood run cold in his weins, sir.”

“Where is Deputy, then? and why is he not here to receive the punishment he deserves?”

“Deputy, sir,” explains the schoolmaster, “is a boy about town, one of the most har-

dened young wretches and blackest of sheep which ever tainted a flock. He'll come to the gallows, sooner or later, and I wish, for the benefit of Cloisterham, that he could come sooner. The drubbing which those boys have received—and justly,” says the schoolmaster, somewhat savagely, for he is beginning to think that Mr. Chrisparkle is not so angry with them as he ought to be, “is as nothing compared to the drubbing which that young wretch should receive if I could get him lawfully under my hand.”

The Revd. Sept now begs the schoolmaster to dismiss the boys, with the exception of the unfortunate Billy, who has to remain to work out his punishment (although the Minor Canon would gladly have tried to obtain a pardon for him if he had dared), and to grant him a few moment's private conversation. This accomplished, he leaves the school again, and turns in the direction of Minor Canon Corner. But not to go home, where the china shepherdess, assisted by Rosa, is laying out for him a snow-white shirt and neckcloth, fragrant from lavender, and examining with the greatest anxiety his best suit, to see if her sharp eyes can discover a fragment of dust upon its spotless black—for her boy is to dine at the Dean's, and Mrs Chrisparkle is

fully aware of the gravity of the occasion. And while performing this labour of love, she pours into Rosa's listening ears such praises of the goodness and excellency of her Sept, that her bright eyes shine brighter at last with tears of happiness and pride.

But her son passes that happy home, though with a loving glance towards it, and crosses into the Monk's Vineyard. Leaving the "Traveller's Twopenny" on his left, he picks his way carefully—for it has been a dull day, and it is already growing dark—through the rubbish which blocks up the road to the unfinished house, of which Durdles is the occupant. He is surprised to find a group of boys standing there, with looks of eager expectation; some of the boldest even trying to peer through the windows.

"Is anything the matter here?" inquires the Minor Canon, drawing aside a flaxen-headed little fellow, who has courteously pulled his curly forelock to the clergyman.

"No, sir," answers the child, with a frightened face, "It's only Durdles, sir."

"Then what are you all doing here?"

"O, if you please, sir, he knows all about the ghost, Durdles do."

"Has he been telling you anything about it?"

“No, sir; he don’t tell us nothing, sir, but he knows all about it—he and Deputy.”

“Deputy, always Deputy!” thinks the Minor Canon, as he asks: “and which is Deputy?”

“O, bless you, sir, he ain’t here, ain’t Deputy. He’s in the ‘Working Man’s Friend’ a drinking beer, and a cutting hup hawful. O Lor, how hawful he’s a cutting up.”

“How do you know he is there?”

“I was there, sir, myself, behind the door, till my mother come, and sent me home to bed; and so I comed here with the others.”

“Is that being a good boy, and doing what your mother has bidden you?”

The child puts his finger into his mouth, and hangs his head abashed; then, looking up, and meeting the kind eyes of the Minor Canon, says simply—

“I know it ain’t being a good boy, but I was a heap too frightened to go to bed alone, and so I comed here with the others.”

“Always this ghost!” sighs the Minor Canon, putting the boys aside and going up to the door. He knocks several times without receiving any answer, and is almost inclined to believe, in spite of the positive assertion of the boys to the contrary, that

Durdles is not within, when suddenly the door is thrust open so violently, that he is nearly thrown down, and the stonemason, armed with a huge cudgel, rushes out.

"You young wagabones!" he ejaculates, swinging his ferocious weapon as the boys scuttle away in all directions, "I'll break every bone in your bodies. O, I didn't see it was you, sir," touching his cap grimly, "I thought it was them young imps of boys."

"May I come in, Durdles?"

"It aint much of a place to come into," retorts that worthy, "but such as it is, you're welcome."

"Durdles, is it true what those boys say?"

"How is Durdles to know what them young wretches says?" inquires the stonemason, with more reason than politeness. "If they says that they scramble through my winders, and knock agin my door, it may be true or it may not."

"Do they do so, Durdles?"

"They would, as soon as not; sooner than not, I makes no doubt on," replies the stonemason, "if Durdles would let 'em; but, as they knows they wouldn't get back again without a broken head, they shows their wisdom in lettin' of it be."

“But I mean about the ghost, Durdles. They say that you, and a boy called Deputy, spread reports in the town that the ghost of the late Mrs. Sapsea haunts the place.”

“Durdles aint done nothin’ of the sort. Durdles knows what he says, and what he says, he means; and what he means, he sticks to. But if other folk will be fools, it ain’t no business of Durdles. He aint no call to conterdict ’em. If they will be fools, let ’em be.”

“But, Durdles, the Mayor informs me that you told him that the body of the deceased Mrs. Sapsea was no longer in her coffin. What do you mean by that strange assertion?”

“Durdles means what he says. He aint in the ’abit of saying what he don’t mean, like folks who was bred for auctioneers, and fitted by Natur for that calling, and who, by setting themselves up to be Mayors—which is beyond ’em—becomes stumbling blocks for other folk to fall over.”

“I know you are an authority in this respect,” says the Minor Canon, musingly, “but it seems almost impossible that any one can have removed the body from where it was laid.”

“And it don’t seem a bit less improbable

to you than it do to Durdles," interrupted the stonemason, "but it's true for all that; and what I say, is—let the coffin be opened; it's easy enough to get at it with the key of the monniment; and then, if the body's there, tell Durdles he's a fool and a hignoramus, and turn him out of Cloisterham as a him-postor."

"It is an awful thing," says the Minor Canon, "to disturb the repose of the dead. Unjustifiable, without the strongest motive."

"Durdles, he's gived his advice," says the stonemason, gruffly, "let Cloisterham decide whether it had better be took or not."

"It is my duty to inform you, Durdles," continues the Revd. Sept, "that the Mayor intends to have you arrested on a charge of using threatening words towards himself, and spreading false reports and rumours in the town, greatly to the detriment of the community, unless you acknowledge openly that your assertions are unfounded, and unworthy of belief."

"Let him do what he likes," answers Durdles, with indifference, "let him make of himself more of a laughing-stock nor he is a'ready. But if he thinks Durdles is to be brow-beat, he'll just find out his mistake, that's all."

“ Well, good-night, Durdles ; I wish I could have obtained your assistance in putting down this scandal.”

“ I wish you could, sir ; but Durdles aint the sort of man to conterdict himself, not if he knows it.”

So the Minor Canon, who has collected very little encouragement from his various visits, walks slowly home, pondering ; and ponders still while he inducts himself into the clothes laid ready for him, with his mother scolding him for being late all the time ; and ponders on his road to the Deanery, where the Dean (upon his dignity) is waiting for him.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING IN THE PARK.

THE young clerk, Mr. Robert Brandis, had hurried away from the kind man who had saved him, not from want of gratitude, but because his heart was too full to permit him to enter and accept of his hospitality, too full to speak.

He had felt, besides, the strong necessity of being alone with himself and God, in order to fight out in solitude the desperate struggle in which he was engaged, for he dared not rest until the enemy lay vanquished.

But he knew he was saved, nevertheless ! He had been faint and ready to die, and the good Samaritan had bound up his wounds, and, pouring in oil and wine, had given a new weapon into his invigorated hand ; a weapon all-powerful, if rightly used, and certain to vanquish—Faith in God.

And so he hurried home to sink upon his knees by his bedside, and never rise till, after the heat and fury of the conflict, he could return devout thanks for the deliverance.

At last, calm and composed, he rose from

his knees again, able now to review his past life without despair, and with newly-awakened hope to think about his future one.

Had not his master spoken the truth when he said that no human being stood alone in the path of suffering! Had not the man, who told him so pathetically his simple story, also travelled through the dark valley of the shadow of death, homeless, friendless, lost; and been raised up from the very depths of his despair to new love and happiness.

And the grand old story of the Patriarch Job, full of everlasting consolation for those who can read and understand—had not he been brought so low that his own wife, his nearest, had bade him “Curse God and die,” and yet been spared to a “latter end more blessed than his beginning.”

Were it not possible that, in the years to come, he might learn to live down his great sorrow, and, peaceful in the present, look back on the agitated and troubled past, as a dreadful dream that had faded.

He fancied if he could pour out his heart to some one else—some one who could counsel and advise him, it would be an inexpressible relief. To confide in Mr. Grewgious was impossible; but was there no one else?

No one else! How could he have forgotten her for a moment? His best and truest friend! His noble counsellor! His tender, patient nurse! His loving, self-denying Madge!

As he thought of her now, with bitter self-accusation, for he had hardly seen her since they parted, when he became Mr. Grewgious' clerk—hardly thought of her, who had thought so much for him, she seemed to rise up before him; her pale, patient face lit up with joy at seeing him; no shadow of reproach in her tender glance, nothing but love in her earnest eyes.

He felt again her cool hand upon his head, felt again her lips upon his brow. He had heeded it little at the time; had accepted her noble self-devotion, as a child accepts the love of its mother; as many a man accepts the life-long sacrifice, the daily offering up of herself upon his altar, of a loving wife or sister, with no sense of the value of the blessing—no fear of losing it.

He remembered now, how in the burning fever, every time he recovered consciousness, it was always she who was his patient companion, the lonely watcher by his couch.

He remembered how pale and thin her cheek, how unnaturally bright her eye, and,

with a sharp pang, he felt for the first time, as if it were a revelation, what her delicate nature must have suffered, and what heroism must have supported her, during those dreary night watchings by his bed, and knew that if she had neglected him he must have perished.

Smiting himself upon the breast, and bitterly upbraiding himself for his cruel neglect, he shuddered to think what agony she would have suffered if the cruel river had cast forth its victim, and she had seen that body which she had sacrificed her own health to save, a fouling corpse.

He shuddered, as the dread knowledge entered into his soul, sharp as that sword which divideth the joints and marrows, that not only himself he would have murdered, but that to her, who had nearly sacrificed her life for him, he would have administered the death-blow.

And yet, amidst all this heart-felt self-reproach, amidst all this sincere desire to make up to her what he had sinned against her, was something of the feeling of a frightened child, stretching out its tiny arms to the mother, knowing that in no place on earth it is so safe as nestling in her bosom ; so, with a passionate desire, as if certain healing were

to be found there, he longed to lay his aching head upon her faithful breast.

He hastily wrote a few lines to her, begging her to meet him on the next Sunday afternoon, when he would be free, in the great park in the North-East of the city, not very far from where she lived; and where she often walked on Sundays, as he knew, when her mother was at the prayer meeting.

And then, worn out by mental conflict, yet soothed by thought of her, he laid his weary head to rest, and soon fell fast asleep.

And as if the spirit of her whom he had evoked, took up its patient watch beside his pillow, so his dreams were peaceful ones; the cruel past fading—the future calm and clear.

* * * * *

The bright September sun rose glorious on the Sunday morning, blessing the sacred day to which it gave its name, and glorifying the busy city for its day of rest. It shone into the attic window at the Billickin's, lighting up with its soft clear ray the face of the sleeping clerk, and tinging his morning dreams, those dreams which it is said will be fulfilled, with love and light.

It shone into Madge's little room, and fell

upon her face, till the bright tears in her eyes—tears of happiness, for he had not forgotten her—sparkled like jewels : and jewels they were, of woman's faith and truth.

It lit up her brown hair, till the heavy braids she was plaiting shone like brightest gold. It shed an aureole round her head, like the glory round a saint's ; and never saint's were better merited.

It peeped askant, as if uncertain of its reception, into mother's room, where that amiable matron lay snoring ; but mother, turning her back upon it, with an evident determination to shut it out, and continue her interesting occupation for a good hour or more, it danced away to brighten up other places.

It had work enough to do, bless you ! It had glorious work to do in the great park ; countless drooping flowers to shine upon and kiss, till their bright faces glowed with shame and happiness, and the tears they had shed during the dark night, dried upon their cheeks.

It had pleasant work to do ; drying the great plots of grass, where the children of the poor, dreaming now of the joy which lay before them, would dance and sport that happy day.

It beautified the great park, where thousands of working people would assemble to drink heaven's air, purer from smoke and dust than was their usual portion.

It shone upon the whole great city, East and West, because it couldn't help itself; but you may be sure that it lingered gladly here; for it loved the poor, because the poor loved it, and welcomed it far more gladly than the rich, who make a sickly, spurious sunshine of their own, and often shut out God's wondrous gift, to bow down before their own false idol.

Madge was ready early in the afternoon. She went away unnoticed by her mother, who was wont to trouble herself very little about her daughter's doings except on a working day, and who rigidly observed the Sabbath as a day of rest; taking a couple of hours' more sleep than usual in the morning; nodding even under the thundering eloquence of the Revd. Jeremiah; and who was, at the moment, snoozing on the sofa in the back parlour, as a good preparation for the prayer meeting and that spiritual dose, which her favourite preacher had concocted in his laboratory, and would administer, *nolens volens*, that evening, with his wonted energy; forcing it down the throats of his hearers—and good stomachs they must have had to digest it.

So Madge was free to go, and she made the most of her opportunity ; for though Robert had told her he would be there by three, and it was hardly two yet, she longed to be alone, to collect her thoughts and calm her too eager expectations, under God's free heaven.

It was a quiet, retired little nook which he had chosen as their meeting-place. They had been there once before together, when he first began to go out, after his illness, leaning on her arm ; and he could not miss her ; so she sat down quietly to wait for him, and to rest a little, and recover breath. It was such a short distance, but it had been painful to her, and cost her some exertion. She was not quite strong, somehow, poor patient Madge ! She had taken cold, she supposed, for she had a cough which would not yield to her simple remedies. It was not much of a cough ; just a short, hard, dry sound sometimes, hardly worth taking notice of ; indeed nobody did take any notice of it ; but she could not get quite rid of it. It troubled her at night mostly, when she started out of some troubled dream, bathed in sweat. And as it hurt her to draw her breath after walking, she did not go out much now ; but sat at home, sewing all the more diligently with her patient hands, which she would not allow to

grow tired ; or reading, on Sunday afternoons, a little book which she had bought and loved to read in ; or, in the gloaming, thinking often, wondering wistfully, if Robert had quite forgotten her in the busy world.

But how foolish had been her fears ! How unjust her repinings ! for he had not, he had not ; he had written to tell her so ; such a kind, loving letter ! She had it in her bosom now, above her beating heart. And how happy, how happy she was !

How pleasant was that shady corner, where the birds were singing ! How blue the bright sky through the waving branches ! How sweet the scent of the flowers ! How cheerful to hear the prattle of the children at their play, softened by the distance ! How pleasant to see the happy people going by ; common people as the world calls them (are they common in the sight of God ?), but gaily attired in their Sunday best, and merry and content. Kind husbands supporting their pleased and happy wives upon their strong arms. Proud parents, surrounded by their sporting children. Lovers, arm in arm, with faces radiant as only love can make them, and lost to all around, except themselves. Brothers and sisters, chattering merrily about some common interest ; differ-

ing sometimes, but making it up again, and always, in spite of that difference, loving one another. Why were the tears rising to her eyes? Why, perversely, did they fall? She was not alone any more, for he was coming.

He was coming! All the dreary days had vanished since he went. The sun had risen every morning, just as if he had been there. The slow hours had crept on—oh, so wearily! and her busy hands, never resting, had plodded at her daily task, patient, patient always, as she used to do. She had shed no tears then, and wherefore now? when the long time of waiting was past and gone, when daylight was breaking up the night of her probation, and he was coming.

She thought of her childhood, sad and solitary, with no one friend but the hard mother, whose love she had not known how to win. She remembered how her childish heart was almost dried up and withered, might have become so quite, perhaps, had she not come across, one day, a poor miserable dog, beaten and half-starved; over whom she had shed tears of pity, and with whom she had shared from that time forth her frugal dinner, pinching herself for him; and more than repaid when he sprang upon her with delight, licking her caressing

hands, and wagging his stump of a tail like mad, for joy at seeing her. And later, when she had partly overcome her excessive timidity, brought on by her exaggerated sense of her own deformity which annoyed her mother so terribly, she had ventured to address a kind word, occasionally, to the children in the neighbourhood, delighted to find that they did not turn away from her in disgust, as she had feared they would ; till, gradually and by degrees, she had become the children's friend, and it was to her they ran for help and soothing in their troubles. It was she who comforted the sorrowful, picked up the fallen, wiped away the tears of the corrected, helped, with her own scant knowledge, the little dunce who found it so hard to learn ; and who was happy, happier than a monarch, when they gathered round her knees, encircled her neck with their soft arms, and, pressing their rosy lips to hers, told her that they loved her. What cared the children for beauty, cold and indifferent to them ! What heeded the children, that Madge's back was not straight like theirs, or that one shoulder was higher than the other ! What minded the children, that her face was pale and thin ; for it was always brightened and glorified with love divine, and to them it was as the face of an angel.

Again the thoughts of the lonely girl, lonely in the crowd, went back to that evening when he, for whom she was waiting, had fallen upon the ground before her, sick even unto death. She knew that hour had been the turning-point in her life. At last, at last, she had found some one who needed her; some one who could accept her self-sacrifice; for whom she could pour out her life blood, drop for drop. At last, the void in her heart was filled up, and from the inexhaustible treasures of her love, she might give freely; asking, wishing for no return. It was to her he had turned for help and comfort in his sickness! It was her hand alone, which could ease his aching head; her voice alone which could soothe him in his restlessness! To her was addressed his first faint smile, his first conscious look; and she loved him! Loved him, as a mother loves her first-born. Loved him, as a sister loves her only brother. Loved him—she knew it now—as a woman loves—as a woman only can love, the chosen of her heart. And yet, as she acknowledged this to herself, acknowledged that no other love could ever drive him from that heart, over which he held undisputed dominion—even while she thanked God for having given her so much, so much, she begged Him to let her be satisfied with

what she had, and long for nothing more. In a perfect agony of supplication, she put up this petition with a bleeding heart.

There are some upon whom fate binds the martyr's cross, even in their cradles. Upon whose tender shoulders he presses the cruel burden, almost too heavy to bear and live. Happy such, if in the midst of their sufferings, they can struggle to attain the martyr's crown! For no diadem is adorned with jewels so precious as this. The laurel wreaths round the heads of poets and of warriors are as nothing compared to it; less than nothing and vanity! O, suffering ones, bowed down and almost broken! lift up your heads; sing praises and rejoice; for you may attain the highest glory and reward which even God can give!

"Madge, my darling Madge! Look at me!"

It was Robert. He had come upon her unawares after all, although she had been waiting for him.

"You have been weeping, Madge," he said, gently drawing down the hands which covered her face, "oh, how much I have to answer for."

"Only for happiness, Robert. Only because I am so glad that you are come."

He sat down by her side. She saw that

he was trembling, and felt that the hand which clasped hers was cold as ice.

“ You have no bad news to tell me ? ” she inquired, breathlessly, “ you are still happy, Robert, where you are ? ”

“ I have an easy place,” he answered, “ and the best of masters. It would be the height of ingratitude to complain.”

“ And you are not ill, Robert, you have not been over-taxing your strength, have you ? ” Only thought for him, only anxiety for him ; putting herself aside, as if she were worth no consideration, only existing to sympathise with him.

“ I am not ill, dear Madge, but I have been suffering great mental distress.”

“ Oh, Robert, Robert, and I not there to comfort you ! ”

“ Through a sea of trouble and suffering, suffering which made me forget even you, I have waded since we parted ; when I left you in vain self-confidence that by my own unaided will, I could banish the memory of the past.”

How encouragingly she pressed his cold hand between hers and strove to warm it !

“ Do you remember, dear,” he continued, “ what trouble I had to get work to do ? How I wandered from place to place, and

from house to house, only to leave them again a thousand times more desolate than I entered them? How almost all hope was gone?"

She, remember? Was there anything connected with him which she could forget? She only smiled in answer.

"There was one place, Madge, which I did not try for, although it seemed to you suited for me in every respect. Do you remember telling me that it looked at you so invitingly out of the columns of the 'Times,' as if it said 'try me, try me!' and wondering why I would not."

"I remember," returned the girl, still fondling his hand for very joy at having him so near her, the light of her life, "I remember, you confided to me at last, that you had reason to fear this man who wanted a clerk, though he was a good man, and though you thought you might succeed with him; yet that you dared not risk his recognising you."

"And when all other chances faded, Madge, when only this one remained, when hunger and want stared me in the face, you suggested this." He pointed to his jet black hair and beard, and tore away the disfiguring blue spectacles as he spoke.

"I reminded you," she said, in her soft voice,

and with her loving eyes upon him, "that you were so changed in your illness, that your own mother would hardly have known you; and that if you dyed your hair and beard, which had grown thick and long, and covered up your eyes with glasses--"

"That I might beard Lucifer in his den, and even the old gentleman would deny the pleasure of my acquaintance," he interrupted, with a bitter laugh. "You were right, Madge."

But, meeting her sorrowful eyes, his voice softened, as he said—

"You were right, dear; I sit at my employer's table; I write at his desk; I go in and out; and no shadow of suspicion that I am other than I seem, ever crosses his face."

"And that is what you wish, is it not, Robert? You would not have it different?"

"But for all that," he continued, without heeding her question, "I cannot banish the past. It haunts me, Madge! It stands beside my desk, raising up before me pictures of what were, and of what might have been. It shows me my own careless indifferent self, accepting the blessings showered on me, with no idea of thanks for the bestower. And it points, sneeringly, mockingly, to those trea-

asures lost and vanished, which I thought I had, exclaiming—‘ Forget them if you can ! ’ ”

“ It stands beside me, at my toilette table, looking jeeringly upon the vain disguises which my looking-glass reflects. It seems to pluck them off, one by one, as it mutters, ‘ others may be deceived, but not I ; naked and undisguised, you stand before me. I read your inmost soul. Fool, you cannot banish me ! Waking or sleeping forget me if you can.’ ”

Then it assumes a still more terrible form. It shows me—tearing open my closed lids, and compelling me to see—horrors which drive me almost mad ; while it roars into my ear like thunder, ‘ Happiness may be forgotten ; favours received may be buried in oblivion ; but while we live, there is no Lethe for suffering and for shame. By the certain memory of cruel wrong and anguish, forget me if you can ! ’ ”

He had risen, his hat had fallen off, and she saw the cruel lines which suffering had graven on his face ; she felt, with unutterable sadness, how little she could help him after all, and covered her face with her hands.

He was stricken again with self-reproach and shame. He sat down and strove to comfort her by a hundred tender words. He told

her, sweetest sustenance for her famishing heart, that if any one could help him to forget, it was she. He never ceased until she raised her head again and smiled back at him.

“Dearest Madge, if you can bear it,” he said at last, “I want to tell you my story. I have thought about it a great deal. I have prayed about it, Madge, and I hope, I know I am doing right, and that you will not betray me.”

Ah, he knew her faithful heart! No torture could have torn it from her!

And thus, in the great park, with the merry sound of the children’s voices in the distance; with her head upon his shoulder, where he had drawn it as she wept; he told her his story. Sometimes sorrowfully, sometimes despairingly, sometimes fiercely, sometimes hushed and trembling as with awe, his voice rose and fell upon her listening ear. She never interrupted him: now her face flushed, now faded pale as death; now her heart beat to suffocation, now seemed to stand still; but she spoke no word until he had ended; then she raised her head and taking both his hands in hers, said, while her hot tears fell—all for him—for him.

“Robert, brother, God has laid His hand heavy upon you, but do not despair. Things

may look different after a while, and," she blushed deeply. "I am not much, I know, but you are not quite friendless, Robert, after all. Oh, remember, dear, that I am always there, that you have a sister left."

He started, changed colour, trembled; then conquering with a stern determination the indecision racking him, looked down upon her with his young, truthful eyes.

"No, Madge, dearest, not that! I want so much to do what is right and what is best for both of us. I think you like me, Madge?"

"I always loved you, dear," she answered.

He had quite recovered his self-possession. His face was pale, but calm and grave. His eyes, shining with a strange new light. His figure elevated and manly. She thought, meeting his eyes wonderingly, that she had never seen him look so noble, and her gentle heart swelled with pride and love for him.

"I was always a poor, selfish fellow, Madge," he said, "and though these troubles have brought me down very low indeed, I do not know that they have made me any better. I have been since then a perfect brute of ingratitude towards you, but I trust I shall never forget any more what I owe you. I have told you my story, word for word. I have not hidden from you even the thoughts

of my heart. But you must agree with me, as to the impossibility of going back. You are unhappy in your home, Madge ; I am, oh so lonely, so exposed to all kinds of dreadful temptations, in mine ! Can we not be happy together ? I am always a better man when I am with you ; and you—you love me, dear. I know you do, because you cannot lie. Will you, my best and dearest friend, can you—”

He broke off abruptly. His calmness forsook him entirely. What was the meaning of that expression on her face ? He had spoken generously, warmly ; he knew that she had nearly sacrificed her life for him ; well, he would make it up to her, he would lay down his for her. Fate would be appeased by this offering. His cruel destiny would be mollified. He had expected to see her face light up with ineffable joy as he spoke ; had fancied she would nestle in his arms, in a content too great for words. But there was more misery than joy in her face. Perhaps she had not understood him ? He hastened to conclude.

“ Madge, my darling Madge, will you be my wife ? ”

He was obliged to let go her hands, for she was struggling to get them free. He saw a

death-like change come over her face, saw her features contract with pain unutterable, saw her hands clasp themselves in an agony of supplication, noted the quivering of her lips.

For a moment! Then the brief struggle was over. It was the last. She had fought it out long ago. At last she raised her heavy eyes to his. Ah, how large they looked in the sunken hollow of her face!

“Do you love *me*, Robert?”

He had spoken of gratitude, had given reasons for his choice, which he knew would weigh heavily with her—his lonely life, the terrible temptations which might return again, but not of love, not one word of love. Even now, the assurance he would have uttered died upon his lips. He could not lie, in presence of those solemn eyes. He bowed his head in troubled silence.

“I know you love me,” she went on, with her clear, ringing voice and quiet certainty, “as you might love your sister, if you had one, Robert. It makes me very happy to know that. But not as you ought to love your wife as you will, I hope and pray, love, when you marry.”

She stopped a moment to cough, with that low, hollow sound, which would have rung upon the ears of a physician like a death

knell, but which her companion heeded as little, as did all the others with whom she came in contact, and laid her hand upon her bosom, as if in pain.

“There is a love,” she continued, looking wistfully up to the deep blue sky, and speaking more to herself than to him, “a love stronger than death, and which must live to all eternity. A love, which only asking to be loved again, would take the loved one to its heart, and defy all misfortune which might come, in the unutterable bliss of that possession.”

Close following the wonder, how in her quiet life she could know of the existence of such a passion, came the troubled consciousness of how she had obtained this knowledge, and his head fell upon his breast.

“Then you refuse me, Madge—my only hope !”

“Because I love you, dear ; far too well to let you sacrifice yourself. Because the time would come when I should be a drawback and a burden to you, and when—oh, how could I live and bear it !—you might learn to hate me.”

“Oh, Madge, could I ever be so lost to good as that ?”

“You think not,” she answered ; “but you

do not know what an awful thing it is to be tied, when one would be free. And besides this, though without hope as yet, you love another."

They were silent for a time. The birds chirped in the branches overhead. The gay people bustled to and fro. There was music in the distance. The sun was sinking towards the west, and the short-lived autumn day drawing to its close.

There was a gentle regret in his mind, a melancholy that was by no means despair. He had done what he believed to be his duty, and she rejected him. She was right, no doubt! She was always right, dear Madge! He felt a great tenderness for her, greater than he had ever felt before. He put his arm round her and drew her closer to his side.

Suddenly a child's sharp, shrill cry broke the silence. It was nothing, only a little one who had fallen, and the mother had it in her arms again; but it startled Madge. She trembled, shivered, looked up.

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "Mother does not know where I am. Good-by, good-by, Robert."

But he would not let her go yet; he took her in his arms, and for one moment she laid her head upon his bosom. He felt full of

gratitude to her; he loved her dearly, dearly that instant.

How plainly her position now showed that cruel deformity! How unjust of God to put such a priceless jewel into such a broken casket! She had saved him once more—his noble, noble Madge! Not love her? he loved her with his whole heart and soul!

He would have kissed her, meant to do so; but a nameless awe fell upon him, and he dared not. He felt as if it would be sacrilege. He only raised her cold hand to his, and pressed it to his warm young lips.

How worn and wan was the face she raised to his! How white the compressed lips! She seemed to have grown years older in that short time.

“And I must go back,” he said at last; “go back to my lonely life, to my suffering, and be patient.”

“When you least expect it, Robert,” she answered, with the conviction of a seer, “God will send light into your darkness. Go back; do your duty faithfully, and trust in Him.”

“And I shall see you often. You will not forget your brother, Madge?”

“Never, never!”

She hurried away. He noticed her bowed

head, her weary gait. He could not let her go thus. He ran after her, held her back once more. A great terror fell upon him.

“God bless you, sister. God watch over and protect you !”

She smiled in answer and turned away again.

He nearly ran after her once more—could only overcome the strong impulse by catching at the branch of a tree, and keeping himself, as it were, back by force.

And so she vanished from his sight.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. DATCHERY KILLS A SPIDER.

WHATEVER curiosity Mrs. Tope may have had concerning the doings of her lodger, Mr. Datchery, during his long absence from Cloisterham, (and you may be sure she was no exception to her sex, or to either sex, for the matter of that, in this respect, and had her full share), she obtained very little gratification for it.

The single buffer, living on his means, appeared quite unexpectedly, and without any previous notice, in his lodgings, cut out of the city wall under the archway, on a pouring wet afternoon; protesting that he was drenched to the skin, and hungry as a wolf; and begging Mrs. Tope to get him a bit of something to peck at, the while he dried and warmed himself at her kitchen fire.

The Verger's wife threw out various little lines, with the hooks thereof cunningly concealed, but landed no fish worth speaking of. Her hopes that his poor dear relative was quite restored again from his attack, "seeing, sir, the Lord be praised! you ain't in mourning," produced only the grumbling answer—

“Confound it, yes! He was so much better that he might be considered out of danger, unless a relapse should occur: in which case he had been fool enough to promise—though old enough to know better—to go up again to London, if requested. And he made no doubt at all, quite the contrary, (savagely) that the relapse *would* occur, and that he *would* be requested. For it seemed as if the whole world were in a conspiracy to worry a buffer, especially if it were known that the said buffer had a particular dislike to being worried.”

And then Mr. Datchery fell to, at a juicy rump steak, with a famous appetite; declaring to Mrs. Tope’s great satisfaction, that there was no ale in the world comparable to that brewed in Cloisterham.

Partaking thereof copiously, before the blazing kitchen fire, with his boots steaming upon the hob, and a fragrant odour from some delicious mixture which Mrs. Tope was concocting for him and which he was to drink boiling hot, to keep him from taking cold after his exposure, tickling his nose, as a delightful foretaste of what it meant to do regarding his palate, this simple-minded individual contrived somehow in the most natural manner in the world, and without asking a

single question—indeed, with rather the air of one who was good-natured enough to listen to her prattle, although it bored him somewhat; he yawned once or twice quite naturally—to obtain from Mrs. Tope's loquacious lips, only too glad to be allowed to open themselves, the sum and substance of everything which had occurred in the town during his absence; and was put upon such terms with the ghost and its usual whereabouts, that he might have risked going out blindfold, and coming upon its haunts as sure as fate.

“And there's some as says,” concluded Mrs. Tope, dropping her voice mysteriously, and looking out of the window into the Precincts to see if any one was passing, “as the poor soul didn't come to her death in a nat'rel way. Yeller she were, afore she died; I remember that well. I think I see her still, a walking in the Close, along with him,” jerking her thumb in the direction of the High Street, and I says to Tope, ‘Tope, ain't she yellor?’ I says. But, Lor', that ain't no proof. It may be slow pison, or it may be bile, yellor may. The doctor said 'twas liver, and he ought to know, though he ain't much looked up to, ain't Mr. Green, as being what you may call fust-rate; and

folks did say as he was called in because he's cheap. But folks *will* talk," said the Verger's wife, with a toss of her head in conscious superiority to "folks" in this respect, "and what with one bit o' scandal and what with another—as I've a said to Tope, a good hundred time, I do believe—my head's a going."

She shook it again, as if she would say, "As it is my fate to lose it, the sooner the better," and looked enquiringly at her lodger, to see what effect this last savoury morsel of news had had upon him.

But he was actually nodding in his seat before the kitchen fire, and as Mrs. Tope's voice died away, she distinctly heard a little incipient snore. Perhaps that roused him, or perhaps the sudden stop in her conversation did.

He started up, covered a tremendous gape with his hand, begged her to go on (very much as if he would say: "Never mind me, my good woman, I can doze just as comfortably when you chatter as when you don't") and declared that delicious mixture had been "really now (ogling at her) a leetle, leetle bit too strong."

Composing himself still more comfortably in the arm chair, he withdrew his feet from

the hob, for his boots were beginning to diffuse a smell of singeing leather, and stretched them out on either side of the fire ; while Mrs. Tope, nothing loth to hold forth, even though her oratory were addressed to sleeping ears, did so for a succeeding quarter-of-an-hour, with much benefit to herself, no doubt—indeed, her lungs were of the strongest, and equal to almost any exertion in this respect—and was bringing herself up with : “ Mr. Edwin, poor fellow ! and did you meet his bereaved, his cruelly, cruelly bereaved uncle in London, sir ? ” when Mr. Datchery woke himself again with a snore, which no stretch of imagination could call incipient any more.

He must have caught some of her last words, though imperfectly, for he said, looking out at the window, that if this wretched weather cleared up a bit to-morrow, he would take a turn at the Cathedral, having nothing on earth else to do, and hear how the new choir-master “ hit it.”

No sooner had he indicated this track, with his sleepy eyes closing again, than Mrs. Tope, who had been waxing melancholy and reflective, with the corner of her apron at her eyes, brightened up amazingly, and dashed into it at full gallop. She entered into a de-

scription of the new choir-master, perfectly appalling in its minuteness of detail. It is very doubtful whether that unfortunate gentleman knew half as much about himself as she knew about him. She had completely solved the question—mooted, of course, immediately on his arrival—as to what position his paternal grandfather and grandmother, and his maternal ditto, ditto, had occupied, in the flesh; how the former had sold tea and coffee and snuff in a small way; and that there were more than suspicions that the head of the latter had originated in the workhouse. She knew all about that connection of his with Miss Flirt, and “a mussy his eyes was opened when they was, for all the world had known that she was makin’ a fool of him, and never meant to have him.”

O ye, with skeletons in your closets!—and who has no such grisly inmate in his house?—who keep them doubly locked up, only daring to look in upon them in the dead of night, when other eyes are closed and distant; be sure that your next door neighbour parades your unholy secret in the full glare of daylight, publicly displays it at his dinner table, jokes about it over his wine, and cruelly tears off the many coverings which you, with beating heart and troubled mind, have

wrapped around it. Be sure, Mr. Dubius, that those frequent visits—mostly in your absence—which young Dr. Jallap pays your pretty wife, and which are beginning to cause you so much secret anxiety and torment—which you try to hide from the world so carefully, and think you do, poor self-deceiving ostrich ! by letting fall occasionally some such simple remark as this : “ Poor Susy suffers so much from nervous headache,” or the like, when everybody knows that she is as robust and healthy a little thing as ever lived—be sure that your bitter secret, hardly acknowledged by yourself—your grisly skeleton of a fear that Dr. Jallap likes the company of your little wife better than he has any right to do, and that your pretty Susy prefers his to that of her lawful love—is known to the whole town ; chattered about at dozens of tea-tables ; joked about everywhere ; while Mrs. Grundy wonders at your blindness, and Mr. Donothing would thrash the fellow to within an inch of his life, by Jove (or says he would), and all the others shake their heads in chorus, and hope, ho—pe (or say they do) it may not end in what they fear.

But to return to Mrs. Tope, who by this time had arrived at the washerwoman of the unfortunate wretch she was analysing—talk

of vivisection and the soft hearts of our women! They will cut up alive (who has not been present at the process? Nay, who has not assisted at it? "He that is without sin among you"—you know the rest) any miserable victim whom they have got on their dissecting table, with a cold-bloodedness and remorselessness, certainly unequalled by such as confine their operations to less noble animals—will tear off the quivering flesh, lay bare the palpitating heart, probe the aching wound, barely cicatrized—Bah, let us leave the odious subject! Pricks of conscience, not quite deadened, point us out as one of the many, not guiltless. Oh, All Merciful, have mercy upon us also, for "in Thy sight can no man living be justified!"

But Mrs. Tope was speaking, and has been interrupted twice.

"Which his washerwoman," she said, "Mrs. Splashem, sir, as I 'ad the honour of recommending to you, says as angels couldn't starch his linning stiff enough for him; he's that partickler. And the rows he makes, as I can testify to, and Tope, too, for the matter of that; for many's the time I've said, 'Tope,' I've said, all of a tremble, 'put hup with such treatment I will not. No, not no longer, I won't. And if you was half a man, Tope,'

I've said, 'you wouldn't stand it neither, that the wife of your bussum, whom you've sworn to protect and cherish, should be pitched into so shameful.' And all about, if you'll believe me, sir, nothing more than a speck of dust on his pianner. Why, Mr. Jasper—"

"Ha! yes! very true!" broke in Mr. Datchery, half asleep and half awake, and yawning enough for a whole school of boys, unwillingly in church. "Exactly so! Most natural that he should visit the place again where he lived so long."

"Why, bless your heart, sir!" ejaculated Mrs. Tope, "you must be dreaming. He havn't been here, Mr. Jasper havn't, not once since he went away. I didn't think he'd have forgot us so soon," she continued, mournfully, with the corner of her apron in play again. "But, after all, it ain't so much of a wonder, neither! He got to hate the place, he did, after Mr. Edwin disappeared. I never see a man so cut up, as he were cut up. I've told Tope so—Lor, I shouldn't like to say how many times."

"Oh! Ah! Never been here, hasn't he?" interposed Mr. Datchery, very red in the face from the heat of the fire outwardly, and the heat of the mixture inwardly. "If it were worth the trouble for a buffer—who, as a

matter of principle, never occupies himself with other people's affairs—to say so, why, he would say: Very sensible of him. Why on earth should he take the trouble to go anywhere, if he wasn't obliged to, and when he was, no doubt, comfortable somewhere else. Speaking now as a buffer, who hated to do anything, and who only implored the universe generally to let him be—why should he?"

Mrs. Tope saw her way very indistinctly to answering this question. To tell the truth, she saw everything indistinctly at that moment, for her eyes were covered with her apron. They generally retired from public observation under this shelter when Mr. Jasper's name was mentioned. Though whether to hide the tears in them, or the want of tears, had been matter of hazy speculation many a time to Mr. Tope, who was less easily affected than his better-half, and who, with the one exception of his Reverence the Dean, was wont to look down upon his species, from a fancied height, deeming them little worthy of nearer contemplation.

From between the apron, Mr. Datchery might have heard issuing, if he had listened, such exclamations as these—

“ Ah, he knowed, he did, Mr. Jasper, what was due to a decent woman, and kept a civil tongue in his head, which it were to be desired, as other folks would do the same, or they might find themselves, some fine morning, with nobody to wait upon 'em, and serve 'em right ! And never, never, never ! (sobbing) could she forget them happy times when she waited upon that bereaved gentleman and (quite convulsed) Mr. Edwin.”

Perhaps Mr. Datchery had slept enough or heard enough ; or, perhaps, he thought that out of the lady (now verging on the hysterical) nothing more was to be got ; or perhaps —there are any number of probabilities possible—he dreaded the scene impending. At any rate, he got up ; obtained possession of his useless hat ; patted his landlady upon her comfortable back ; bade her cheer up, for she was a jolly old girl, who knew to a T what was good for a buffer ; informed her (at the window, as he hurried away) that he was going for a run, as it had ceased raining, to oil his joints, and prevent their stiffening after his exposure ; and was through the archway before she had time to let her apron fall.

If Mr. Tope had been there to see her, he might have come to a rapid conclusion of his

speculations, for her eyes were dry, when they showed themselves again ; and, like a prudent manager, she put off her hysterics for a more favourable opportunity (for what on earth is the good of having hysterics, with nobody to hear you ?) and bustled about busy as a bee, to make all spick and span for her good man, and her lodger on their return ; like the natty, active, contented little woman she was, upon the whole. Even, like the busy bee again, humming, as she did so.

Mr. Datchery had not proceeded far, lounging along the wet High Street, duller and emptier than usual on account of the rain, and looking about him as coolly and indifferently as a buffer interested in nothing on earth could be supposed to look, when he encountered his former acquaintance and friend, Winks, alias Deputy.

But not alone ! With head erect, and conscious superiority upon every line of his expressive countenance, he tramped along the pavement of the wet street, attended by an admiring retinue, composed of boys of all ages and sizes, who tramped also in energetic emulation of their chief, making the quiet High Street resound with unwonted echoes ; and who strove, though unsuccessfully, to carry their heads as high as he.

Mr. Datchery had been either prepared for this astounding spectacle, by the narration of Mrs. Tope which had been as exhaustive as possible; or might have been incapable of feeling surprise. At any rate, he showed none, but, raising the hat which covered his snowy locks, as the cavalcade swept towards him, made, with mock courtesy, a low obeisance to its chief.

Deputy, stopping short, kicked out behind him, as a mild hint to those in arrear not to press too closely on his imperial heels, but to preserve a respectful distance, and returned the salute with tremendous gravity.

“ So yer back again, Dick! Well, I’m glad to see yer! Since that moment when yer tore yerself out o’ my encircling harms, with hanguish, things has been brightenin’ hup in this stoopid old place. Hopenings has been found for a hindividdle of my talents. (Billy Jones, if you kick my shins agin, blowed if I won’t peach on yer.) If yer wants to harn a penny, Dick, just cut across to the ‘ Working Men’s Fren,’ and tell ’em that I’m a puttin’ hup for the evening at the ‘ Cock and Bull;’ and if yer wants to know how to lay out yer penny when he’s harned, why there’s a mixtur a brewing a puppus for me, in that there same ’ighly respectful ouse of henter-

tainment for man and baste, the likes of which yer niver tasted; and as a fren o'mine, yer'll be welcome there. O revoor, Dick; which is to say, as you're probly not acquainted with the langvidge: shall be glad to see yer. (Ho, Billy Jones, yer will, will yer? Go 'ome ye young waggybond, and dream o' the lickin' ye're a goin' to git to-morrow from the school-master. I wouldn't be the flesh which kivers your bones, not if I knowed it.) Now little uns, I hain't no hobjections to yer follorin' of me to the 'Cock and Bull,' if yer behaves yerselves. When we comes there, ye've got to cut yer luckys, ye know. Fall back into the line, you young divils! Steady there! March!" and the sleepy High Street re-echoed again to the sound of tramping feet; while Mr. Datchery stood staring after them, quite confounded, with his hat still in his hand, and the rain, slowly falling again, wetting his patriarchal locks.

Bursting into a low chuckle, after a moment or two, he put on his hat, and turning back through the High Street, re-entered the archway leading to the Cathedral Close. He chuckled once more, as he looked up at the Gate House in passing, with a strange expression of power in his face (there was nobody there to notice him) very different to

that careless, unconcerned air it usually wore. He paused for an instant, before the little door leading into the Precincts—that little door through which Mr. and Mrs. Tope made their exits, and their entrances, when he was there, and which had been unused during his absence, and watched with considerable curiosity (childish and unaccountable curiosity, as it would seem) a spider killing a fly in a corner. He let the spider kill the helpless fly undisturbed ; let him suck his victim's blood ; watched him retreat to his corner again, after repairing his cruel web, which the poor fly had torn in its struggles to get free ; and smiled to see him cowering there, evidently on the look out for another foolish fly, and perfectly secure, and at his ease. Then he picked up a bit of stick, and deliberately crunched the monster, muttering as he did so, "you won't kill any more flies, I fancy, master," and then looked up again at the Gate House (visible from this side also) and at a shadow on the blind, reminding him, perhaps, of another shadow he had seen there once before, with the same curious look of triumph on his face.

Lounging on again into the Cathedral Close, with his hands clasped behind him, carelessly enough, apparently ; and yet, for an

acute observer, with a significant pressure of his right hand thumb on his left palm, indicative of having something there, real or imaginary, which he held tight and fast, and did not mean to let go ; he passed by Minor Canon Corner, and the Minor Canon's cheerful home, and glanced into the lighted room, where the shutters were yet unfastened, and where a dainty china shepherdess, placid and content, sat knitting and listening to a song—a simple English ditty, none of your Italian fal-lal-la's ; only one of those familiar home melodies that make the heart tremble, and the tears come into one's eyes—which a fresh, sweet young voice, was trilling out into the night. Even the buffer, with nothing better to do than to kill a spider which, after all, was only carrying out its vocation, slackened his already slow pace to listen. Who could remain indifferent to such sweet sights and sounds ? But the song ceased ; a brisk housemaid, rosy with ribbons, bustled out to put up the shutters ; and the buffer, feeling perhaps the evening duller, and the rain chillier than before, hurried on to the churchyard. He must have been a brave man, this buffer living on his means, for he stood alone in the darkness, where no two other souls in Cloisterham would have ventured together at.

that time of day or night; namely, opposite Mrs. Sapsea's arrogant and imposing monument which, tall and sepulchral in that faint light—the white marble seemed to illuminate the whole place with a light of its own, so wet and shining was it—might have been Mrs. Sapsea's ghost drawn out to an unlimited extent, and weeping, as the rain splashed upon it, with a weird and melancholy sound—weeping for the trouble she had unwittingly and unwillingly brought upon her native city, and her mourning lord.

It was too dark to make out the inscription, even if it had not been blurred and rendered indistinct by the falling rain, or Mrs. Sapsea's tears. But Mr. Datchery knew it by heart, and besides it was hardly likely he would have come there to peruse it under such unfavourable circumstances. He viewed it, however, long and steadily; and viewed the Cathedral long and steadily; and even entered the churchyard, "ruining," as Mrs. Tope told him next morning reproachfully, "a new pair of boots in the wet grass," and paced the space between Cathedral and churchyard carefully, as if he were measuring the distance, and calculating upon it.

Mrs. Tope had looked out several times for her lodger, before he returned; and had

had time to relate to Tope most circumstantially the whole conversation which she had held with him, interspersed with innumerable, "so he says, and so I says, says I;" and had profited by the opportunity, to inculcate into that worthy (almost as sleepy as Mr. Datchery) the excessive horror which the lodger had exhibited on hearing that he, Tope, "had not stood up for her, in the matter of the new choir-master, and the pianner; as a man and a brother ought to have done, not to speak of a husband, which aggravated it immense;" and had assured him with a little bit of invention not uncommon, in order to produce a more powerful effect, and rouse up his deadened conscience, how Mr. Datchery had remarked with emphasis, "that Tope had gone down tremendously in his opinion since hearing it;" and had retreated several times behind her apron, when her husband's cold-heartedness had been too much for her; and was still behind it, sniffing, when the expected rap came upon the door.

But she forgot all about it then, as she curtsied Mr. Datchery his welcome. For how wet he was (with a little scream), wetter than he had been before!

Oh, these men! they wanted more looking after than the children, bless 'em! Why,

Tope would be laid up with the rheumatics every day in the year, if she didn't see after him.

Then she persisted, although he declared he wanted nothing, in preparing for him another glass of the fragrant mixture. And she brought it to him in his own parlour, where she had lit a small fire, when she came to bid him good-night.

Mr. Datchery sat smoking for another hour or two in front of his fire, pondering and reflective, before he went to chalk up his reckoning behind his cupboard door; but the strokes, with which he did so at last, were firm and sure, and he added it up with a mighty flourish, looking like a shout of triumph. Then he turned into his bedroom for the night.

If Mrs. Tope, snoring peacefully in the arms of Morpheus, not to mention those of her lord (which mightn't be considered proper) could have witnessed what was going on in the bedroom of her lodger, she would not have closed an eye for terror and alarm. For, this apparently simple-minded individual, throwing off his snowy locks with a sigh of relief, and divesting himself of his blue coat and buff waistcoat, cunningly padded, stood revealed in that solitude as a supple, slender,

well-built man, with dark hair, wonderfully matching his dark eyebrows; with keen bright eyes, and stern, determined expression; a perfect contrast to the easy-going buffer of an hour ago.

And yet, though Mrs. Tope, prostrate and insensible by the burly form of her conjugal partner who was keeping up, in a deep bass, a continuous accompaniment to her treble snore, would have denied all knowledge of this man; Mother Coombs could have pointed him out with dead certainty as “T’other three and sixpence.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAYOR UNDER A CLOUD.

THERE had been several consultations with the Mayor since that momentous one with Miss Twinkleton, and even the Dean himself had embraced a favourable opportunity for speaking a few words in private with his Honour—weighty words, gravely uttered, and producing much effect.

Things had come to such a pass in Cloisterham that Mr. Sapsea's life was hardly safe in the old city; and he was virtually compelled, under the transparent pretence of ill health, to take his constitutionals in the seclusion of his own apartments. The necessity for taking immediate measures became daily more urgent.

Cloisterham had made up its mind at last, that the reason why Mrs. Sapsea was not where she ought to be (*viz.*, in her grave) was, that she had been murdered: and it is a well-known fact, requiring no further argument, that under such circumstances no one can be expected to remain quiet in that place of abode.

Cloisterham had made up its mind long ago as to the fact of her not being there. Why, Durdles said she wasn't, and there was an end of it.

Durdles, sir, was an authority; and if you, ma'am, wish to persuade me of the contrary, you've got hold of the wrong person, I can tell you.

Then, this question being settled (I presume, sir, and madam, that you are retiring abashed from the arena; for nothing answers better than putting down an opposition by one bold stroke), remained the other. Why was she not there? Answer: Because she had been murdered. (You are requested not to enter too closely into the merits of this logic. It is convenient and to the point, and what would you have more?) Then, this last and most important question: Who had murdered her?

Cloisterham was a long time in answering this; a very long time. Mrs. Grundy had her own private opinion, it is true, but couldn't make up her mind to proclaim it openly. Mrs. Grundy generally tried to keep in with the authorities.

But when that famous matron noted that the star of this authority was on the wane, nay, nearly setting, she let loose that tongue

of hers, always ready to wag; and, with a cup of tea in her hand (she had swallowed several before, perhaps to fortify herself) answered loudly this important question, Who had murdered Mrs. Sapsea? with:

“Why, who but her husband!”

There was no earthly reason why he should have done so; but that made no difference to Cloisterham. He had expected a great deal of silent adoration and looking up to, undoubtedly, yet had never been otherwise an unkind husband; but Cloisterham was not the sort of city to puzzle its head with any such unnecessary details.

Just as in the years past, this city of a bygone time would have condemned and burnt a witch (after first torturing her) only because she was accused of being one; so they condemned and would have executed Mr. Sapsea as a murderer, for the sole reason that he was accused of being it.

“If for the purposes of hargueyment,” such a Cloisterham worthy would say, jovial and jocose after his beer, and full of peace and goodwill towards all men (not even excluding his wife, who has a hard time of it with him, poor soul! upon the whole; and could tell you pretty correctly how to cure a black eye, and show as little as pos-

sible of it during the process to the curious world) except, perhaps, towards the one whom he is so anxious to get hung—"If for the purposes of hargueyment, you adopts that hargueyment, why, I only axes you: can you tell me, why the most murderers makes away with their wictims? To put it in a nutshell, why did Jones pison Robinson?"

And fully convinced that he has driven you into a corner—which he has, for you never heard of Jones and never heard of Robinson—he winks delightedly at his boon companions, and imparts to them, in a hoarse whisper, that he reckons he had you there, and hit you hard.

Among the many, anxious to place the rope round the murderer's neck (and it is astonishing how many competitors there always are for this odious office, which it might be supposed for the sake of common humanity, one would only be too glad to leave to the hangman, and birds of his feather), there were some who even went further than the general voice; some who even mooted the hypothesis that Mr. Sapsea had not only murdered Mrs. Sapsea by slow degrees, but Mr. Edwin Drood by rapid ones; that he was, in short, one of those wholesale murderers, offshoots

of the devil, who spring up, from time to time, to show us of what mankind is capable, and prove that if, as Wordsworth says, "trailing clouds of glory, we do come from God," we most certainly must have passed through the other place also, on our transit, and accumulated no small proportion of its filth.

But these latter voices were in the minority as yet. It is true, Cloisterham worthies, knocking their wooden heads together, in their eagerness to get at the woodener head of their chief, felt a natural reluctance to abandon so charming a theory, replete with horrors far exceeding those in which they were reveling.

It is true that this appropriate and apposite remark—suggestive of so much—"there is no saying" was frequently heard in connection with it; but, on the whole, it was not pursued with eagerness. Perhaps these blind, still felt so much sympathy with their blind leader, as to be willing to give him the benefit of a doubt; or perhaps some latent ray of common sense warned them that by so doing they might miss their point altogether, and go far beyond it.

Some few adherents still clung fondly to him, who had been the former object of so much reverence and admiration. Among

the warmest of these was Miss Twinkleton. In a constant state of flaming indignation against the public, this excellent lady found herself far less able than usual to cope with the rebellious spirits of the young ladies.

Mrs. Tisher declared that she never knew her friend so subject to the tantrums as at this period; and that she never before had so deeply regretted those halcyon days when her departed had cut and dressed the public hair. (This last was not uttered in presence of the young ladies, as every sensible reader will understand.)

So it had come to pass that Mr. Sapsea's life was hardly safe in Cloisterham, and that he was forced to make use of his hall and passage as a promenade. Stones, thrown by invisible hands, had struck him painfully behind, and even had the presumption to ascend to the magisterial hat, and precipitate that priestly and venerable headpiece into the gutter.

Rotten eggs had sullied the purity of his nether garments, and had audaciously laid their desecrating touch upon the majesty of his black, and, previously, spotless coat.

A drowned kitten, foul to touch and scent, had alighted upon his august head from an unknown window in the High Street.

“Where’s yer wife?” became the popular street cry in Cloisterham, repeated with shouts of derisive laughter. Placards were posted on the door of the Mayor’s house, full of vague threatenings. Anonymous letters were addressed to his Honour, containing the ominous words: “Who poisoned the old lady?”

And one morning the effigy of Mr. Sapsea’s paternal ancestor was discovered arrayed in black, with a white handkerchief at its eyes, as if he whom it signified were weeping and mourning over the degeneracy of his son and successor.

At last private counsel and advice, and public execration and ignominy, prevailed with his Honour, and he made his famous suggestion that the vault should be entered, the coffin opened, and the body examined, “so as to put an end for ever (so the Mayor worded it) to all these false and lying calumniations, concocted by his enemies; who, jealous of his high renown, had sought by such means, base enough for the Evil One, to undermine and ruin him. But (so the Mayor concluded) their vile machinations would perish and come to shame, and they along with them; and his tarnished honour would shine more brightly than ever

for the ordeal to which it had been subjected."

On hearing of this decree, the few constant admirers of his Honour, who had taken to skulking in by-ways, and hardly dared show themselves in the light of day, raised their voices again in a perfect shout of triumph.

They had always said so ; had always known that no man alive, except his Honour, was equal to the occasion. His disinterestedness ; his complete putting aside of his private feelings for the public benefit ; his sound common sense in suggesting the only thing which could silence for ever the voice of the backbiter ; his triumphant heading of that verb which as yet had been so imperfectly conjugated in Cloisterham, to wit : Thou must put it down ; he, she, or it, must put it down ; we, you, or they, must put it down ; with : I will put it down—taking such certain steps for doing it—they could hardly sufficiently extol.

Therefore, in pursuance of his suggestion, the Mayor handed over to Mr. Chrisparkle, as ambassador of his Reverence the Dean, the heavy key opening the door of Mrs. Sapsea's monument, with full authority to make such use of it as he thought proper ; and Durdles was communicated with ; and one or two other

men were bidden to meet at a certain place, quietly, to arouse no sensation, and for a dread and solemn purpose.

* * * * *

“T’other three-and-sixpence” rose early the next day, bright and clear as the morning itself, glorious after the rain; and spent a good half-hour in rubbing and scrubbing his devoted body, and splashing himself with water, according to the wont of Englishmen; until he glowed again from the exertion.

Then he assumed his snowy wig, inducted himself into his loose grey trousers, and padded waistcoat, buttoned over the whole his blue surtout, and finally sauntered, with his hands in the pockets of his pantaloons, into his little sitting-room—where active Mrs. Tope, never dreaming of the metamorphose, which the wall between them had hidden from her sharp eyes, was preparing breakfast—the jolliest and donthingest of buffers in the three Kingdoms.

He was bubbling over with good humour and content, and his dark eyes twinkled under his dark eyebrows as he chuckled Mrs. Tope under her comely chin (noways displeased, though bidding him go along with himself, and wondering what the world was coming

to when old gents took to the likes of that) and declared, sniffing the fragrant air, issuing from the kitchen where some slices of ham were broiling on a gridiron, that never buffer had slipped into such good quarters as he had slipped into ; and the D. take him if he was ever fool enough to leave 'em again, unless that relapse which his con—, he begged her pardon, but surely never buffer—who only requested to be left alone ; a most modest wish, truly !—was put upon as he was put upon.

What on earth did it matter to him whether people were born or did the other thing ; and devil a bit he cared whether his respected relative should choose to remain in this valley, or should choose to quit it, so long as he left him alone. He only asked him—and really, that wasn't asking much, in his opinion—to die and be done with it, or live and be done with it, only not to bother him.

And then, the ham being broiled to a nicety ; and the coffee as clear and strong as even Mrs. Tope could make it ; and a plate of hot toast, juicy with melted butter, seeming to beg him to dispose of it as speedily as possible, so alluringly it invited attention ; Mrs. Tope made her parting curtsy, and, wishing him a good appetite, left him to enjoy the viands she had set before him.

He had done full justice to her supplies ; and had almost disposed of them behind his padded waistcoat (nearly superfluous, then) ; and was contemplating, with lingering tenderness, one last slice of ham, for which he could not find a corner ; when his attention was attracted by a sharp whistle outside, followed by a handful of gravel which rattled on his window-panes.

“ Ah ! My young friend ! ” said Mr. Datchery, smiling, and looking out of the window, where no one was to be seen, “ who seems to have made a rise in life, since my feelings were so cruelly lacerated by the separation from him ; let us see what he wants.”

Rising deliberately, he took his useless hat, and with one last lingering look behind, directed towards the ham, made up his mind to tear himself away out of reach of its seductions, and slowly sauntered forth.

He had not gone far, when a stone, first striking against his broad pantaloons, fell clattering behind him on the pavement of the High Street. And a moment afterwards, Deputy, grinning delightedly, and with the gap in his teeth leaving room for all enquiring spirits to look right down into his throat, was at his side.

“Hullo ! ole chap ! Why didn’t yer come ter the ‘Cock and Bull’ last night ? Ye’d a heerd some’at as would a made yer jolly white ’air stand on end, I’ll warrant yer.”

“It don’t stand on end so easily,” answered Mr. Datchery, shaking his heavy locks, and running his hand through them as he spoke, “you won’t come over *me* with your gammon. Out with it, Winks, and tell me what’s at the bottom of all this rubbish.”

They had turned out of the High Street. The single buffer seemed not altogether proud of his companion, and hastened, as much as so slow-going a buffer could hasten, to get with him into less frequented paths.

Deputy, instead of answering, turned somersault after somersault with ecstasy and delight, and coming upon his feet again, as if he had never left them, presented gratuitously more tongue and throat than ever to the public notice.

At last, recovering a little from his rapture, he began to explain, turning topsy-turvy from time to time, when his feelings got the better of him.

“Oh, Lor’, the spree I’ve bin a having, Dick ! To see ’em a settin’ round me gapin’ ; and the faymales a goin’ off ; and the old uns a turnin’ hup their hies like dyin’ ducks ; and

the little uns under the tables a'most dead with fright, and gitten wholloped for doin' of it—oh, Lor', I'm fit to bust!—and me, a swillin beer as grave as a judge, and a drawin' on my invention as solemn as a hundertaker. It ull be the death of me, it will," and Deputy went round and round again.

"Then it's all lies you tell," cried Mr. Datchery. "Good gracious, Winks! it would take the strongest man I ever knew, to give you the thrashing you deserve."

"I believe yer!" said Winks, enraptured, and evidently receiving the remark as the fullest-blown compliment. "My mother could lay on better than any man I ever knowed, but she weren't strong enuf for me. If I were flayed alive, and roasted arterwards, it wouldn't be arf enuf for them inventions."

For one second of time Mr. Datchery's right arm was agitated as if it were tempted to try what *it* could do in this respect, at any rate. For one second of time, his eyes flashed, and his smiling mouth grew stern; but before Deputy (on his head at the moment) had noted the change, it was gone again. Only a careless buffer, to whom the doings of the whole world were matters of perfect indifference, was slowly sauntering by his side; with lazy hands widening the pockets of his pantaloons.

“I’m free to confess to yer, as a frien’, Dick,” continued Deputy, after having exhausted the exuberance of his emotion, and sobering down again, “that them hinventions don’t halways come heasy. Bless yer! I lays awake o’ nights in the ‘Travellers Two-penny,’ and wastes the few minnits o’ sleep which I might ’ave, in thinkin’ of the next hevening and how hi’m to git through it.” And Deputy pressed his hand to his brow, like a popular author, from whose pen new and stimulating sustenance is ever loudly demanded from his eager patrons, and whose weary and exhausted brain sometimes refuses to give when called upon.

“And so there’s nothing at all in the whole affair, but your invention, Winks? Well, I congratulate you! You have proved yourself sufficient to set a whole town by the ears, at all events.”

“I wouldn’t go so fur as to say that, neither,” answered Deputy, thoughtfully, “there’s summut in it, Dick, arter all; though blowed if I know what? I heerd Durdles say to the Mayor—the hauctioneer, yer know—that his dead missus warnt no more in her coffin and was praps hairin’ of herself above ground; me and lots of hother coves heerd it, but there wasn’t nobody but me hup to

the hoccasion. I seed the hopenig, and become the man of the sitivation. That's were it is, Dick."

"So Durdles said that, did he?" asked Mr. Datchery. "As far as I know him, he isn't the sort of man to raise up such a report without foundation. He must have some reason for what he says."

"Do yer think its true then, Dick? Hi don't. Hi niver seed her. I wish hi could. I 'aint afeerd of ghostesses. Lor, the spree, to see her a comin' towards us, with oles for hies, her jaws a fallin' on her breast and wrapped round in her grave-clothes. Do yer think the worms would creep hin, and the worms would creep hout, Dick? I'd give a penny to see her. Bellows me, if I wouldn't!"

"What do you mean to do, Winks?" inquired Mr. Datchery, who, lost in thought, had hardly heeded his strange companion's last words, "when you're found out? It'll come to an end some time, you know, and then you're sure to be."

"Then I means to cut my lucky," answered the boy, with seriousness. "There ain't no hopenig 'ere for a cove o' my talents, anyways. The pay at the 'Travellers Twopenny' haint enuf to keep a feller in clothes to kiver hisself," with a glance at his ragged

garments, which performed that office very indifferently, certainly, "and now Durdles have turned agin me, hout of pure henvy, I can't look upon the stonin' of 'im 'ome, as a source of hincome any more. So I'm a goin' hup to Lunnen; and I promise yer, not to forgit yer, Dick, when I'm at the top o' the ladder."

Probably thinking that the ladder, which his ragged friend was likely to ascend, was one from which the descent would be a rapid and final one, by means of a rope; the buffer living on his means, began to rattle in the right hand pocket of his pantaloons, and finally drew forth a coin of respectable appearance.

"Here, Winks, that's because you've been useful to me once or twice, helped me to pass away an idle hour or two; but now, take my advice and get away from here as fast as you can. That's a dangerous game you've been playing at, my boy! and I'm afraid you'll live to repent it."

"Teach yer venerable grandmother to suck heggs!" retorted Deputy, with immense scorn, pocketing the coin, "what a gaby yer air, Dick! Yer don't suppose as I'm a gwine to let 'em git at me, do yer? Lor, wouldn't they like to! The Dean hisself, Mr. Chris-

parkle, the Mayor—I'm fit to bust agin when I think of his face, when he fust catch sight o' his daddy, all in black, with a white handkercher at his nose—the schoolmaster, who licks the hothers hextry, 'cause he can't get hold of me. Hi takes care of what hi does! 'Tis halways hothers who shouts after the Mayor in the streets! There haint nobody can't hindentify me! And if they ventures to hassault me, I'll have the law on 'em, blowed if I won't!" And Deputy, mockingly touching his crownless hat, somersaults himself out of Mr. Datchery's range of vision, leaving that astonished buffer, still widening the pockets of his pantaloons, to wander about in his aimless way, and kill time, in order to get an appetite for dinner.

* * * * *

On the afternoon of that same day, Mr. Chrisparkle, pale and agitated, hurried up to the Mayor's house, and requested an immediate audience of that dignitary. He found his Honour complacently awaiting his arrival, with a bottle of port and a couple of glasses before him (one of which had been made use of), after an early dinner, and already contemplating with "the eye of his mind, the utter confusion with which his enemies would

be scattered and put to flight before the strong power of the truth." But Mr. Sapsea's lips, slightly parted still with this sentiment, opened themselves yet wider, though speechless, when Mr. Chrisparkle communicated to him the awful news of which he was the bearer. His jaws fell aghast; his plump cheeks, glowing from rosy wine, grew sunk and haggard. Wine, which cheers the heart of man, was powerless to perform that good office any more for Mr. Sapsea, and as for oil to make his face to shine, that was rendered superfluous by the sweat of anguish which lubricated his elevated brow. Unclerical to the last degree, old, helpless, paralytic, trembling, he glared back speechlessly at the Minor Canon, a miserable, idiotic old man. In the moment when real strength of mind and energy were most needed, the insufferable vanity and pomposity which had struggled (pretty successfully too, as far as Cloisterham was concerned) to supply their vacant places, broke down utterly, and left him to bear alone his ignominy and his shame.

For the Minor Canon had broken to him, gently and considerately, that Durdles' dread assertion had been proved true beyond a doubt; that the opened coffin of Mrs. Sapsea

had disclosed no dead form mouldering away, but was perfectly empty, with the exception of a little case containing a ring—a lady's ring, with a rose of diamonds and rubies, and which possibly Mr. Sapsea would be able to identify as the property of the deceased. That a great crime had been committed ; the sanctity of the grave defiled ; and the dead body forcibly removed from its resting-place. That, what had been the motive, remained, of course, at present, shrouded in profoundest mystery, but that the course to be pursued was plain and clear, and would no doubt accord with Mr. Sapsea's wishes. The matter must be placed at once, without delay, in the hands of the authorities, and all the machinery of the law put in motion to discover and hunt down the perpetrator of the crime.

So far, Mr. Chrisparkle, warm and eager, yet tender too towards the wretched old man, so terribly affected by the disclosure ; but there was no getting anything out of Mr. Sapsea. He did not attempt to identify the ring or not to identify it. He only whined like a child for his housekeeper ; and when she came, frightened to see her pompous master brought so low, and full of curiosity to hear what had happened, he said he “ must

go to bed, must go to bed," and after she had brought him there, putting him to bed as if he were a baby, he drew the counterpane over his head like a frightened child, as if he would shut out the dreadful, dreadful news, and the cruel, cruel world, mocking him in his abasement.

Of course the news ran through Cloisterham like wildfire. Mr. Chrisparkle had not left the Mayor's house an hour, before the whole town rang with it, though that discreet and honourable gentleman had not mentioned a word of it to any one except the Dean, to whom he hastened, as a matter of duty, immediately on leaving Mr. Sapsea. But the china shepherdess was looking out for him long before he returned, restless from curiosity; and he had hardly alighted on the doormat, before she had him by the button and was conducting him—her rosy cheeks and bright eyes, brighter than ever from excitement—into her own private sitting-room.

"Now sit down, my dear, and tell me all about it. Circumstantially, if you please, Sept. That silly Mary, who has just heard it from Mrs. Tope, is so flighty and so bewildered, and puts in so many unnecessary words, that I can hardly make out which is top and which is bottom; but you know all about it."

“I am afraid, ma—” began her son, doubtfully.

“I hope, I really do hope,” interrupted the old lady, with greatly heightened colour, “that you are not going to say, Sept, that you are afraid to confide in your own mother. It would cut me to the heart to hear that my son, my only son, should refuse to impart to her who bore him a secret which maids and menials are permitted to discuss. I was made the repository of many secrets before you were born, Sept,” continued she, with dignity and a vibrating cap, “and no one ventured then to be afraid that I was not to be trusted in.”

“Why, ma, dear,” expostulated her son, “what put that into your head? You may be sure—”

“If my son takes pleasure in seeing his only mother upon the rack,” went on the china shepherdess, a little incoherently, and tapping now her daintily slippered foot impatiently upon the floor, “sitting, figuratively, upon coals to hear what he has to say, and he wandering into discussions totally foreign to the purpose, then she only hopes and prays to be enabled to bear her cruel fate with resignation.”

The Revd. Septimus had no resource after this but to impart to his mother all he knew ;

and if he had not been the most upright of men, he would probably have imparted a little more than that, so very inquisitive and insatiable was the china shepherdess. But when he had finished at last, utterly declining to embellish the story with any supplementary invention, she went across to where he sat, and kissed his rosy, honest face, again and again ; declaring that he was the best and dearest of boys, and that she thanked heaven on her kness, her bended knees, night and morning, for having given her such a blessing ; adding, nevertheless, although her conscience pricked her all the time for having given way to temper in her impatience—for what woman can rise to the loftiness of confessing herself in the wrong?—

“ But you shouldn’t tease your poor old mother, Sept.”

To which her son replied by begging her pardon ; only concluding with—

“ For you know, ma, I would not worry you intentionally for the world.”

Good, good Minor Canon ! Noble, honest, patient man ! Thank heaven for such as he ! Thank heaven that amidst the dross and worldliness around us, there are still some such pure bits of gold, fresh from God’s own mint. For without them the world would be

indeed but a barren wilderness—a valley of the shadow of death, terminating in the bitterness of death itself, without one ray of hope. Thank heaven for such as he! For only they keep alive and fan into brightness our faith in man—our faith in God—which would otherwise splutter and die out into utter darkness.

Mr. Datchery had no time that evening to listen to garrulous Mrs. Tope, most anxious to communicate to him the ghastly news; no shadow of interest to bestow upon what, even to the most indifferent of buffers, might have appeared a subject worthy of some curiosity; for he had other business on hand—business so urgent that it absorbed and swallowed up the whole of his attention.

He had returned to his lodgings after his usual afternoon stroll, flurried, and out of breath, and informed Mrs. Tope that he had received tidings of the dreaded relapse, as he had known he should; and that this time he believed the old fellow meant to pass off the stage for good and all, so there was no help for him, and no resource but to keep his promise. And he had already ordered a post chaise at the Crozier, which was now waiting for him at the door, so as to catch the up-express for London; and he rattled away in

it, refusing the cup of tea which Mrs. Tope hospitably pressed upon him, execrating his unfortunate relative, and wishing him a hundred times at Jericho, or any other place as conveniently remote.

But Mrs. Tope remarked to Mr. Tope over their tea, in the partaking of which they had been disturbed by his arrival and departure, that she could see through a stone wall as well as most people, and for all the old chap had gone on so, he hadn't been able to hide from *her* the exultation in his face ; and that she made no doubt, not she, that he would come in for a good thing when the relative died, and that he knowed it. "For, oh," continued the Verger's wife, "it is a 'artless, 'artless world!"—by which she probably meant heartless and not what she said, or there would have been no apparent reason in her retiring behind her apron—to Mr. Tope's great discomposure—and sniffing and gurgling there for some succeeding moments.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ MA ” AND HER BOY !

TRIUMPHANTLY scattering his enemies, the autumn fog and mist, which had hung heavily all the morning over Cloisterham, the sun broke forth in all his splendour, radiant and eager to prove his power still, although winter was fast approaching—cruel winter, which made him pale and feeble ; in contest with whom he grew weak and faint, and which sometimes shut him out from communion with his bride, the earth,—sad and mournful at his absence—for weeks together. The wind, which had been coquetting with the east, and almost inclined to favour that stern suitor, thought better of it as the day advanced, and with it the sunshine, warm and steady, and joining hands with her glorious co-operator, they made common cause together. One might almost have fancied summer had come back again, so delicious and balmy, so health-giving and invigorating, was the fragrant air.

Rosa was gone out for a solitary walk. The little creature seemed to like nothing better

than these solitary walks, and had laughingly declined the escort of the Minor Canon, reminding him that under the pretence of watching the slumbers of the china shepherdess, he was accustomed to take his own "nod" after dinner, and that she had caught him many a time in the act; and as for his mother—(who had declared, with energy, that even if her lazy boy staid at home, *she* meant to accompany Rosa, "for a young girl, my dear, gets to moping when she's too much alone, and though I'm not much of a companion, for as Shakespeare says—was it Shakespeare, or Milton, Sept?—'Crabbed age and youth cannot live together,' yet I hope I'm not quite so 'full of care' yet, as to be worse than nobody")—*she* was disposed of on the comfortable sofa, and covered over with a light shawl; the blind let down to shut out the too intrusive sunshine; and the girl gone with noiseless step; before the old lady had time to remonstrate against this summary treatment, or forget it, in her first happy dream about her boy, sitting musing at her side.

Rosa sometimes returned from these solitary walks with grave, pensive eyes; sometimes—though rarely—with reddened eyelids; but always with a happy, even gay smile upon her lips. With a firmness of purpose

and steadfastness of decision, rare and beautiful in one so young, the girl quietly took up the burden laid upon her; and however heavily it might sometimes press upon her weary shoulders, little accustomed to trouble and care, she bore it bravely and uncomplainingly. Treading the path she believed it to be her duty to tread, she trod it unfalteringly and steadily—though often with bleeding feet and sad heart, poor child!—never looking back. And if sometimes her heart was heavy; if sometimes the hot tears would rise; she never intruded that heavy heart on her companions; only let the tears fall in solitude. In her new home, in presence of Mrs. Chrisparkle and her son, her kind protectors, she was always the bright, cheerful, happy Rosebud of former days. Only a little more earnest, a little more thoughtful, a great deal more tender and womanly; and as the admiring china shepherdess used to think—watching the sweet face, from which the saucy, discontented look, which had often marred its beauty in the times past, had vanished quite—a thousand times more beautiful than ever, and a joy to look upon.

Never had old Mrs. Chrisparkle (and it may be observed here that the word *old*, as applied to the dainty china shepherdess, is

merely an additional term of endearment, and by no means otherwise applicable to so active, brisk, and charming a lady), never had she felt herself so happy as during these last autumn weeks—the time since Rosa had sat regularly at the dinner-table in Minor Canon Corner.

Her life had been formerly all bound up in her son—her noble Sept—and she had contemplated his ever marrying with secret uneasiness and fear. She had longed, with unconscious egotism, to keep him altogether for herself, and had hardly been able to bear the thought, which would occur sometimes, that any other woman should or could ever occupy a higher place in his heart than that on which she sat enthroned, and where—so far as she knew—she stilled reigned in undisputed dominion.

An undefined fear of, she knew not what, had wormed at her heart with regard to Helena Landless, only because she was, without doubt, a very handsome and noble young woman, “though not to my taste, nor, thank God! to Sept’s,” thought the old lady, and perhaps on that account she had judged the brother more severely and harshly than her otherwise generous and kindly nature would have done. She breathed more freely when

they had left the town, and rarely spoke of them.

Mrs. Chrisparkle also had a most decided antipathy to Miss Dean, who "set her cap" most openly and shamelessly (as the old lady said) at the Minor Canon, and ridiculed that young lady in private conversation with her son as a "finicking old maid" (oh, if Miss Dean could have heard it!) "who, at her age, ought to be ashamed of herself." And yet there were many in Cloisterham who thought the match would be a famous one for the Minor Canon, and quite the making of him; and you may be sure that the Dean (though not proud, and born himself in a village parsonage, where his father had been perpetual curate) would have looked upon it almost in a light of a *mésalliance* for his daughter, and, perhaps, only given his final consent under the influence of the prayers and tears of the enamoured Miss Dean. How different things look from different points of view! How entirely depends the answer on the side from which the question is regarded!

It may appear strange that the china shepherdess should, under these circumstances, have consented to receive a girl, young and beautiful, into her house. But under the motherly bosom of the old lady, beat the

warmest and kindest heart in the world. The lonely and almost friendless position of the orphan girl, her sad fate, her wonderful and touching beauty, all combined to fan that tender heart into warmest compassion and earnest wish to cherish and comfort her. And when the little beauty came, and, with tears in her dark eyes, nestled into the mother's arms, beseeching her with her sweet, plaintive voice, to love her a little, for she needed love so much, the old lady's heart opened wide to receive her, and she took in this new inmate with joy and thankfulness, to be unto her as a daughter.

The china shepherdess had been accustomed to rule her son with loving tyranny, and to receive from him implicit and cheerful obedience—to treat him as a child, in short—long after he had trodden out the shoes of his childhood; and his sweet and yielding disposition (where yielding was not unmanly or wrong; for no one could maintain a right position more firmly than the Minor Canon) had rendered this easy to her.

She had persisted in looking upon him as a boy, unripe and inexperienced, long after he was a man in his prime, and in correct and sound judgment, knowledge of the world, and clear good sense, immeasurably her

superior; and she entertained no serious doubt but that, in the matter of his marrying—if she *must* lose him—he would submit, as he always had submitted, to her decision. That he could form plans of his own; that he could conceive an attachment before she had sanctioned it; that he could, worst of all, tenderly, yet firmly, even marry in opposition to her decree, if necessary—these were possibilities which never entered the fond mother's mind.

Oh, these mothers; God bless them! They bind around their children strong bonds of love, exacting bonds often, it is true; but how fatally their tender hearts are torn, when the boy—the growing man—impatient of this gentle control, tears them off, heedlessly, almost cruelly. And how willingly many a man, in later life, would wear again those silken fetters, if he could get back the dead mother for whom his soul yearns, and whose love for him was greater, deeper, holier far, than any love of after years!

Although no woman can quite occupy the position in a woman's heart which man assumes as his proud prerogative—for all love between the sexes, not only that of husband to wife, but also that of father to daughter, brother to sister, mother to her man-child, is

brightened with a radiance all its own, tinged with a glory more superb and dazzling, glowed through with gold and purple ; while the love between like and like is softer, more tranquil and placid ; the bread of life nourishing and sustaining ; not like the wine which may typify the other, and which makes the life-blood run quicker, and the heart glow and throb again—yet there are some voids in a woman's heart which only a woman can fill up ; and something of this truth was coming home to the china shepherdess.

She delighted in the graceful, girlish form, beautifying every corner of the quiet home ; listened entranced to the sweet, ringing voice, fresh and clear as the first lark of the morning ; let the happy tears fall when the child's bell-like treble mingled its clear notes with those manly ones of her Sept in a duet together. Then the mother's heart would swell with tenderness as she watched them with rapture.

How well they suited one another ! How beautiful they were ! Her noble, handsome, manly Sept, with his fair hair, blue eyes, rosy cheeks and happy, cheerful, contented look ; and the lovely little creature by his side, her soft brown curls hardly reach-

ing to his shoulder. Would to God they might sing that duet through life together! Yes, she could give up her boy to her. She could take this little motherless girl into her heart and keep her there always; not to depose her Sept, but to nestle there by his side. Oh, that her dream might be realized!

And so the dear old lady took to musing, and never were the Revd. Septimus's stockings so neglected as at this period. With her knitting lying forgotten on her lap (that dear mother's lap which had been the sure and certain solace of little Sept's childish troubles thirty years ago—nay, the Minor Canon still remembered, and teased his mother about it sometimes, how she had sought to draw him there, long after he was a big boy, deep in the mysteries of his Latin Grammar, and conjugating his Greek verbs, and often sadly puzzled and mystified thereby—thinking, dear old soul! that a hug and a cuddle from his mammy must console and aid him even then. To which the china shepherdess would reply, bridling, that she abhorred the practice of telling tales out of school, and therefore wouldn't say what trouble she had had to detach him from her apron strings, and drive him, big baby that he had been, from that

place of refuge), the mother would erect her airy castles, laying brick on brick, and stone on stone, and decorating the edifice with all sorts of bright visions and fancies, to a perfect Paradise. And she wove her web like a cunning little spider to catch her heedless fly, looking out with bright eyes from her hiding-place, and watching for the time when he would be entangled helplessly in that gossamer net, and wholly at her mercy.

Only this very day, in which Rosa had gone for a walk, and the mother and son were alone together;—the former sleeping sweetly now, and dreaming of the realisation of her dreams; while the latter, sitting musing at her side, was building very different castles for himself, perhaps;—the china shepherdess had been fretting and fuming inwardly at the slow progress which her cherished romance was making, and almost angry, for the first time in her life, with her idolised son. For the Minor Canon's behaviour to Rosa was exactly the same now, after a month's constant intercourse, as it had been on her arrival.

He agreed with his mother that she was one of the dearest of girls! He agreed with his mother that she was one of the most beautiful! He agreed with his mother that the man who won her would be a happy man, and a man worthy of envy!

But he did it all with his honest eyes looking straight into those of the china shepherdess, and it did not seem to enter his head to put himself into the position of the man to be envied.

Mrs. Chrisparkle could never discover, though she watched most perseveringly, that his colour rose when the girl entered, or faded when she went. His manner towards her was all it ought to be ; gentle and chivalrous, like a true gentleman ; kind and considerate, like a true Christian ; but that was all ! Anxious, plotting little mother, that was all !

Foolish, foolish china shepherdess ! Canst thou not remember thy own youthful days, when, with tears and trembling, with blushes and stolen kisses, oh, so sweet ! thou plightedst thy troth, under the blossoming lime trees, to the Revd. James Chrisparkle, poor curate, with one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Why is it that the smell of the lime blossoms thrills thy old heart even now with tenderness inexpressible, bringing back the old, old time again—the glorious time of youth and happiness ?

Why dost thou always assert that no scent is comparable to that of the lime, that no rose or mignonette can vie with it in frag-

rance? Would any number of Crœsuses or Adonises have tempted thee to break that vow and made thee false to thy Revd. James, who to all eyes but thine own, dazzled by love, was a plain, simple-looking man enough, with sandy hair and eyebrows, shabby black coat, and eyes, only beautiful when full of love for thee?

Didst thou not declare to thy disapproving parents—for who can live on one hundred and fifty pounds a year?—that it was more than enough for thee; and, with stamping foot and flashing eyes, in which the bright tears sparkled—hast forgotten it, china shepherdess?—thou wouldst, *wouldst* marry thy beloved James, or die for him.

And didst thou not keep thy vow, like a brave little woman as thou art, for better, for worse; brushing the rusty coat with thine own fair hands; and mending the worn gloves; till death came between you, and tore him from thy side?

How strange it is to go back to the time when one was young, and full of noble, generous impulses, foolish often, but true always, and think of the sordid, careworn, unhallowed motives which often weigh down the balance now!

Sordid age, bow thy head abashed before

generous youth. Aye, before thine own generous youth of long ago!

“Are you asleep, Sept?” inquired the old lady, coming back to reality and the waking world again, and arranging her ruffled cap, “because if you are not, my dear, I want to talk to you.”

“I! Asleep!” answered the Minor Canon, starting out of his reverie, “why, no, ma; I was only thinking.”

“You think, and muse, and dream a good deal lately,” continued the china shepherdess archly, with a glance at the mirror opposite, to see if her cap sat straight, and noways displeased to get a peep of the reflection of a face still fair, and comely, and dimpled; a charming face to kiss, as her son averred, making shameless use of his privilege in this respect. “Now I wonder, Sept, if an old woman—(how persistently her looking-glass gave her the lie, and how little discomposed she was at being thus rudely contradicted) an *old* woman, who has not forgotten the memories of her youth, can guess of what—of whom you have been thinking.”

Could it be possible that she had divined his secret? The warm blood always ready to betray him—for though brave and manly, the Minor Canon was as sensitive as a maiden—

rushed into his face, as he thought that it might be possible.

The bright eyes of the china shepherdess had wandered from the mirror to her son's face, and noting the answering colour hoisted there, she smiled, well satisfied.

"Oh, Sept," said she, in a burst of maternal affection, drawing his head to her bosom, and laying her own upon it; disregarding of her cap, disregarding of everything but the love she bore him, the only pledge left her from her dead husband, the beautified image of his lost father; "oh Sept, my darling, light of my eyes! I have had a hard struggle to make up my mind to losing you, but I am resigned now. I am sure it is for the best, and that you will be happy; and I have overcome the selfishness that bid me try to keep you, and can, *can* bid you Godspeed upon your way."

Saying which, the old lady, who was not of the sentimental sort, and who rarely made any fuss about her deep love for her treasure, and never openly paraded it, gave utterance to one sob; and then releasing him, after a final hug, drew up again, smoothing her cap and laughing at his ruffled locks.

"Why, ma," expostulated the Minor Canon, agitated still, though trying to turn it off

with a joke, "what are you going to do with me? Do you mean to banish me from your presence? Do I look consumptive, or do you see latent signs of fever in my physiognomy? What is the meaning of this solemn leave-taking? for such it appeared to my bewildered brain."

"Don't make fun of your old mother, Sept, for loving you a great deal better than you deserve; but treat her with that becoming respect and reverence which she has always inculcated upon you, and hoped to have done successfully."

"But, ma, I'm quite in the dark as to what you mean. May I beg of you to be a little less Sphinx-like and oracular? May I request you to throw some light on the obscurity of your remarks? I've known you long as a tyrannical and overbearing parent, ma, but never as a mystery. Be so kind as to explain yourself."

"You wicked, mischievous boy!" said the mother, with a proud, exultant glance at his stalwart form, leaning against the mantelpiece, "you are too big to be whipped any more, but you deserve whipping for your impudence, that you do; for you know very well what I mean. Tyrannical, indeed!" she added, with a toss of her head, "I should

like to see what you would have turned out—having lost your poor papa so early—if I hadn't kept a high hand over you ; aye, and the whip hand, too, many a time."

Now it was a cherished fiction with the china shepherdess, affording her son much amusement, and herself much secret satisfaction and approbation of conscience, that she had been, on the whole, a very strict and stern mother to her boy.

"I always tried to do my duty by him," she would say, "hard though it was. I had to unite the discipline of the father with the tenderness of a mother, and I never let my own feelings stand in the way of his good. I did not spare the rod, thank God ! and spoil my child."

Whereas, to confess the truth, this rod, wielded in imagination by the china shepherdess, was of the most fictitious description possible, and had never had any palpable form whatever. If constant love and tenderness could spoil—which they never can—then the boy might have been spoiled a hundred times.

But he had inherited a noble nature from his dead as well as from his living parent, and the sight of a cloud on his mother's face, or, still more terrible, a tear in her bright eyes,

would reduce the little rebel, even in his most obstreperous moments, to instant and perfect obedience. Her gentle penalties, retracted ere inflicted, would have been treated with indifference, perhaps with ridicule and scorn, but not her love! That was all-powerful; and so the boy had grown up to be one of the best of men, and the delight of his mother's heart.

"If you think, ma," said the Minor Canon, laughing heartily, "that a whipping would be beneficial to me, even now, pray do administer it. It might brighten my intellect, and curb my waywardness, as it always used to do, and I shouldn't mind it at all, any more now, than then. Do, ma, you couldn't hurt a fly, you know, and never did, and I should quite enjoy it."

"Go along with you!" said the china shepherdess, indignantly, "and don't *chaff* me, as you call it, any longer, for I don't intend to put up with it. You think you may venture to take liberties with me now you are so big. Just hand me my knitting, sir, out of that basket there," she continued, "your stockings are all out of heel, through tramping about so incessantly, and I haven't a minute's time to spare, before they are repaired. Ah, you may laugh at your old mother,

but you would get on badly enough without her, I promise you ! No, you stupid boy, not that basket, the other one ! ”

“ Ma, I never knew you so vituperative, and so overbearing, though your character is not one of the softest, as I know to my cost. You must have something dreadful on your mind. Pray, do not keep me any longer in this cruel suspense. Have some consideration for the fineness of my sensibilities.”

But the china shepherdess seemed in no hurry to begin. Perhaps she found the task not quite so easy as she had anticipated. Her fingers trembled as she busied herself with the knitting on her lap, and it was only to hide her flushing face that she bent over it so perseveringly. She even cleared her throat several times, bidding the Revd. Sept see if the window were fast closed, and hoping she had not taken cold ; though this pretence was of the shallowest, for her voice was as clear as a bell. At last she spoke, somewhat nervously, and without raising her eyes from the knitting which at that moment seemed to require her closest attention.

“ Sept, my dear,” she said, rushing into her subject headlong, now she had begun. “ It is almost time you should think about getting married. You are old enough now to take a wife, my son.”

Was the road being paved for him quite unexpectedly, or was some unforeseen and unprepared-for obstacle starting up to hinder him? Either possibility made his heart beat fast and loud, and every nerve throb, but he still went on jokingly; though, if his mother had not been herself so agitated, she must have noticed the quaver in his voice.

“*Almost*, ma! I shall be six-and-thirty next week. By-the-by, don’t forget my birthday, ma. I shall expect a cake, you know, on that festive occasion, and I suppose that stocking over which you are so busy is intended as a birthday gift. How old were you when you married, ma?”

“I was sixteen, my dear, as I have often told you (as indeed she had, for nothing the mother loved better than to chatter with her son about old times, and nothing the son loved better than to listen to her); but that is a very different thing. The sexes bear no comparison in this respect. I should say that in experience and knowledge of the world, I was about as old then, as you are now. Men,” said the china shepherdess, with gravity and perfect good faith, “are children more than half their lives.”

“Don’t you think I had better wait another ten or twenty years, ma,” inquired her son?

“I might then have attained some small ex-

perience, and have learned how to rule a wife. I suppose you think a man ought to rule his wife, ma?"

"Why, bless me!" said the old lady, "of course I do. You don't suppose I don't know my duty, Sept. The same Bible which says, 'Children, obey your parents,' (very emphatically) says, 'Wives, obey your husbands;' as you ought to know better than I, being a clergyman; and if your poor papa were alive, he would tell you that his will was always my law. Not but what he often gave way to me; he was always kind and good; you can't be a better man than your father, Sept. For instance, when he would say, 'Let us have a pudding for dinner to-day, love,' he was fond of puddings, poor dear! and used to say, nobody could make a pudding as well as I—"

"Ah, that's what I say, too," interrupted her son.

"Then I would answer," continued the old lady, "we have hot meat to-day for dinner, James, let us have the pudding to-morrow, with the cold mutton (for we were poor then, Sept, and had to cut our coat according to our cloth, and if my six little darlings had lived to grow up, God knows how I should have got them educated) why,

I never knew your papa to answer otherwise than, ‘As you think best, love.’ Ah, he was a good, good man! He was easy to obey,” and the old lady wiped her overflowing eyes.

“So now, joking apart, let us be earnest, Sept,” continued the china shepherdess, after a moment’s pause, during which she, good Protestant though she were, and strongly as she would have repudiated any tendency to Romanism, had been putting up a prayer for the dead. “It has cost me many a tear in private, but I know you are old enough, although I have tried to put off the evil day, and make-believe that you were not. And if your fancy should be my fancy, and God grant that it may be so!” cried the mother, lifting her eyes, full of tears again, “then we may still be happy—happier than ever.”

“Who is your fancy, mother?”

How constrained and toneless was the voice, otherwise so pleasant to hear! Was the mother deaf to the pain which jarred and vibrated through it? Deaf for the first time to a cry of suffering from her boy?

“Why, our darling Rosa, Sept; our pretty coaxing, loving little bird. Of course, I mean her and no other. The most beautiful girl in the whole world, and the dearest. Whom I love as a daughter, even before she is your

wife. Oh, how much more shall I love her then!" In her eagerness, the china shepherdess never dreamed that the girl herself might be an obstacle, never had imagined for one moment, that anybody could refuse her Sept.

The Minor Canon was silent. His rosy face grew pale, and out of his blue eyes looked a sort of anguish. He knew he must destroy her bright vision; wake her up out of her happy dream. Knew, that he must speak at last, and disclose his long cherished secret. And yet, brave man though he were—no fear for himself would have daunted him—he shrunk back and hesitated. The pain of giving her pain was almost more than he could bear.

How wonderful and incomprehensible is the love of man to woman, and woman to man! God-given, it is as inexorable as any of His laws. Natural affection, the love of parent to child, and child to parent, flows on in an even and placid course; its presence is instinctive and born with us, and its absence almost impossible to understand! But as for that affection, most absolute of all; powerful enough to rend and destroy the other—sometimes, though erringly, called affection of the choice, though choice has nothing to do with it—who can fathom or explain its profound

mystery? Wise men love foolish women with a fervour and intensity of passion, which the silly creatures can neither estimate nor understand. Noble hearts break every day for love of weak and miserable ones, who have spurned the God-like offering. Every man, who has really loved, can give his version of the old, old story, sing his stanza of the old, old song. He knows, and could tell you, how indifferent he was to the whole galaxy of beauties, all (or so he fancied) so anxious to captivate him. How steeled he was against those lovely black ringlets of Miss Smith, which the young lady, herself, thought irresistible! How he laughed inwardly at mamma's all too great anxiety, that he should hear Louisa sing, and at her whispered communication, "that the dear girl's voice would be worth a fortune on the stage!" How he congratulated himself upon being "up to a thing or two," and "not to be caught with chaff," until his hour came, and she appeared, radiant as a goddess, before whose feet he fell in adoration; whose hair was an aureole of light; before whose eyes his own sank abashed. Who made his heart beat to suffocation when she came, and whose absence rendered the brightest scene a barren wilderness! In whose presence, the sky shone

bluer; the sunshine beamed more radiant; the birds sang more divinely. Whom he dreamed of, and longed for, night and day! For whose sake, he would have gone through fire and water, a great deal sooner than not! Who was his ideal of womanhood, the only being on earth worthy of love, and whom he felt he must win, or die and perish utterly!

Listen now, to the comments of the gentleman's friends upon the subject. They cannot imagine, not being themselves in love with Miss Green, what Brown sees in her. She has red hair—all nonsense about golden!—and is covered with freckles. She is too silly to say “Bo! to a goose” (by which flattering synonym they probably allude to Brown himself), she is always grinning, to show off a set of teeth, which are the only good points about her—what on earth does Brown mean by a “divine smile,” the great booby! And so on, *ad infinitum*. It is a matter of perfect indifference to us, of course, whether Brown won his Miss Smith and lived happy with her ever after; or whether his love burnt itself out before the honeymoon was over; or whether he never married her at all. Of one thing we may be sure, that this Brown, or any other Brown was a wiser man ever after, that he had learned that love is not to

be trifled with, but is a real malady, of which the end may be life or may be death.

But to return to the Minor Canon, who was in the height of the fever; who knew now that the new love would have to wrestle with the old; and whose heart sank within him as he thought what might be the issue of the conflict. But with aching heart he girded up his loins for the battle.

“Mother,” he said, seating himself on a low chair at her feet, and gently taking the knitting, all tangled and wrong, from her nervously fidgetting hands, which he lovingly pressed between his own, “I am deeply grieved to disappoint you—I am sure you believe that—but we cannot influence our feelings in this matter, I think,” with a sad smile, “and though I would never have made a choice without consulting you, yet this love has come to me unsought, I know not how; and I am powerless, even if I would, to drive it away. Mother, I have no heart to bestow on the girl you have chosen, even if it were possible for a plain, unworthy man like myself, to win one so universally courted and admired, for—I love another.”

It was out at last. He breathed more freely when he had made the confession; and in his steadfast eyes shone a light so true

and tender, that his mother's loving heart was touched.

But she could not grant him such an easy victory; would not lay down her arms yet. She was angry and bitterly disappointed; and with a hasty, impetuous exclamation, she drew away her hand from his caressing one.

“Let me go, Sept. I'm nothing to you any more now. I'm only a bit of useless ballast to be thrown overboard without the least compunction. An old, *old* woman, with one foot in her coffin. But you might have waited till I was there altogether, Sept. It won't be long now, and then you may bring a hundred new-fangled wives to Minor Canon Corner, and your dead mother will be none the wiser.”

She broke down with a sob; but catching sight of his deeply pained and troubled face, her anger died away, and she threw herself, weeping, upon his bosom. And the Minor Canon—all honour to him!—mingled his tears with hers.

“Oh, forgive me, Sept. It's wicked of me to pain and hurt you so; and I know you can't help it, my poor boy! I thought I was good. I thought I could bear trouble and not repine. I lost my six babies and my husband, and though it was hard to bear, I

could still say—‘Thy will be done,’ but I can’t now. I cannot give up my last, my only treasure. I hate her before I know who she is. She must be cruel and wicked to want to rob me of all I have.”

“Oh, ma, she does not even know that I love her! I used to give myself airs of superiority, and fancy I could teach her, who has taught me so much, who is so immeasurably my superior. I sometimes feel a sort of despair when I think how unlikely it is that I shall ever win her. She seems to me to be in the world and not of it, so saint like and noble is she, and so beautiful.”

“Who can it be?” thought the old lady, wiping her eyes and rapidly reviewing in imagination all the young ladies whom she knew; breaking out—as at the end of a mental vista, she seemed to see the simpering and triumphant face of Miss Dean—with:

“Don’t tell me it is Miss Dean, Sept, whatever you do. I can bear a great deal, as I have proved, I am sure, to-day, but I cannot bear that—no, not to have you made a Bishop to-morrow, and that has always been my brightest day-dream, as you know.”

But as she read in her son’s eyes a smiling renunciation of this idea, she smiled too. The brief thunderstorm was passing over, and

sunshine coming back to Minor Canon Corner. In the sunny heart of the old lady, no anger could live long. It was speedily smothered, or driven out, by a whole legion of loves and graces, aghast at this invasion of their dominion.

"Then who is it, Sept? You can't keep it from me now any longer, you false boy."

And seating himself again in the low seat at her feet, he told her—told her, though the communication brought back one transient flash. She was not angry, but very, very grave and sad when he ended.

"There, my dear, it's no good being angry, even if I could be angry long with you," she said, shedding a quiet tear or two, "but it seems to me very hopeless, Sept. And one thing you must promise me. I won't dictate to you any more, my dear, I have no right to do it; but you must promise me not to say one word to her about your love until the time shall come—if it ever does—when her brother is completely cleared from that dreadful suspicion which rests upon him."

"A suspicion as groundless, as false! As wicked, as unfounded!" cried the Minor Canon.

"But it is there, my son! And as long as it is, you dare not marry her. I would not allow it, Sept."

“And if it is never cleared?” said her son, bitterly.

“Then you must give it up, Sept,” said the old lady, decidedly, nodding her head and compressing her lips, and all unaware of the dangerous ground upon which she was treading. “I would never give my consent to it, never!” And she knitted on again quite composedly. Of course her son would abide by her decision. Had he not always done so? She had gone to meet him half-way, and he must do the same.

“*Mother!*” said the Minor Canon. And as the old lady heard that word, she trembled and her soul quailed within her. It was not angry, not even loud; but it proclaimed a steadfastness of purpose, before which her own unworthy opposition shrunk back appalled. He had risen, and looked down upon her with an unwonted fire in his eyes—a fire which seemed to burn and scorch her up, and almost to annihilate her. For the first time in her life she felt afraid of her son, and trembled in his presence.

“Mother,” he said again, “would you have me act a part so ignoble and so debased? Would you have me keep back from her whom I love, at the very time when she needed love most? I am certain that the

time will come when her brother will be shown, in the eyes of the whole world, to be as innocent, as he, in truth, is; but even if it were not so, I declare to you that I would still pray and strive to make myself worthy of her. And that if she can learn to love me, I will do my best to win her, so help me God !”

And though a moment after, his whole soul melted into tenderness towards her who had borne him, and taking her into his arms, he assured her, with a hundred loving words, and a hundred kisses, that no new love could weaken or cast out the old, and that he had never loved her so well as then, yet he never gave that promise, and the old lady did not dare to urge him. For though humiliated and conquered, she was proud and exultant, too. In the first serious conflict between them, her son had proved the superiority of his arms, and she gloried in her conqueror; for, in her secret heart, she acknowledged that his cause had been a true and just one, and knew that he was right.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO BIRDS OF NIGHT.

MR. JOHN JASPER, sitting watching behind the window curtain of the room he had hired in Staple Inn, and Mr. Grewgious, watching *him* with intently screwed-up eyes from behind his window curtain opposite, must both have spent a dreary and unprofitable afternoon.

“Umph!” said Mr. Grewgious at last, yawning, and releasing his weary eyes from the restraint imposed upon them, “if he has not been more fortunate than I, then there is no denying that we have both been wasting our time most egregiously.”

For a leaden sky hung so threateningly and uncompromisingly over Staple Inn and the whole wide city, and wore a frown so sullen and sombre, so hopeless and dreary, that only such as had no choice, or were driven out by stern necessity, dared to brave it and venture forth.

Many of the less frequented streets were nearly empty, and Staple Inn in particular was as deserted as the desert of Sahara ;

while the angry wind, raging through it in sudden and unexpected gusts, brought clouds of dust, almost sufficient to have swamped a small caravan, thereby increasing its resemblance to that world-renowned and often-quoted wilderness.

“There’s nobody been going either in or out,” soliloquized Mr. Grewgious further, solitary in his office (he had sent his clerk away for two or three days’ change of air, “for the poor, industrious fellow grew quite haggard and down in the mouth, and ‘all work and no play—’ you know”), “and my pretty Rosa is safe, thank God! in Cloisterham. Neither Mr. Neville nor his handsome sister have put a nose outside the door this whole afternoon, and I should wonder if they did, for the wind is sharp enough and keen enough to bite off that useful and ornamental member; and really, as regards the sister’s, it would be a loss to society.”

Here Mr. Grewgious gave his own proboscis a thoughtful tug, perhaps from association of ideas, perhaps as a sort of congratulation to it that it was not under the unpleasant necessity of exposing itself to the chance of such a dismal fate; whereupon, as the injured member resented this treatment with a violent sneeze, he punished it

severely with a red and yellow pocket-handkerchief, leaving it to glare out irate and fiery from his otherwise unmoved and unsympathetic countenance, as he resumed his meditations.

“Mr. Tartar is out of town, somewhere—as I could have told my respected friend opposite, and saved him the trouble of finding out for himself, if it were not the chief employment of my life to distract and puzzle him—gone, as I remember now, down to Cloisterham to visit his old friend, and pay his respects to the “charming old lady” his mother. There is no charming *young* lady in the case, I suppose? Oh dear, no! Certainly not!”

“Bless me! how red my nose is, and how frightfully my little looking glass reflects and contorts that would-be look of archness in my face. It is blushing, no doubt, honest member! at its master presuming to be satirical, he being, of all men, the most eminently unfitted to maintain that character. Hiram Grewgious! Hiram Grewgious! keep strictly within those narrow limits in which you were placed by an all-wise Providence, or you will come to grief. What a mercy there is no one here to see or hear me!

“Cunning youth! But he can’t hoodwink me, and I—presumptuous I—am the last man in the world who ought to blame him. But if his all-too evident admiration should worry and annoy my sweet ward, he will find he has to deal with a tougher customer in me than he thinks for. And yet, if she could learn to love him—he is not worthy of such a prize, but no man is, and he seems to be a brave and noble young fellow, far better suited to her than the poor boy so basely murdered—why then—then I could be content to die and to be buried—cheaply, and without any unnecessary expenditure of money, which might afterwards be useful to them—leaving behind to the child whom I look upon almost as my own, the little property which I have amassed, and my love and blessing. Ho, old skulker! up to a new game, are you? Bowled out of the other, hey?”

This last remark, though addressed to Mr. John Jasper over the way, was neither heard, nor intended to be heard, by that gentleman, who, with scowling face to match the scowling sky, was, at the moment when Mr. Grewgious caught sight of him, issuing from the doorway opposite.

“Out for a solitary walk by this weather?”

continued the old man, watching him till he disappeared through the gateway, "that has a bad look, bird of night! I'm not rancorous, as a rule, I hope, but I wish, I do wish that the wind would bite off *your* nose; or, better still, your head; or, better still, take you up bodily, and waft you into the river, or any other place where the world's eyes would be rid of the sight of you, crawling and stinging reptile that you are! There! I'm calling names; I, quiet Hiram Grewgious! but I do wish that something would happen to enable me to wash my hands of this dirty work, which I loathe and abhor, and which only the strongest necessity—"

Breaking off abruptly, he sighed and fell into a muse, which lasted until he was aroused by the entrance of a visitor, whom the sharp wind and the lowering sky had not been able to keep back, and who came in with a quick eager step, not even waiting for an answer to his announcing rap.

A man of about forty or thereabouts, with dark hair and black eyebrows; out of whose flashing eyes darted exultant light, which *would* break through and break up the studied gravity of his face.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he exclaimed, "for breaking in thus unceremoniously upon

you, but I am the bearer of good news! glorious news! and that must be my excuse. We have got our hand upon him at last, and hold him tight. He is run to earth, I tell you. Run to earth!"

And leaving Mr. Grewgious to execute a most remarkable and ingenious dance of his own invention—something in the dancing-dervish style, though infinitely more complicated, and fraught with danger to every article of furniture in the room—and his astonished visitor, *alias* Mr. Datchery, *alias* "T'other Three and Sixpence," to look on amazed, let us array ourselves in our thickest overcoat and warmest comforter, and, umbrella not forgotten, for heavy drops are beginning to fall, sally forth to follow the fortunes of Mr. John Jasper.

The threatened rain had come at last. First fell single, heavy drops; then many in company; then a flood. Undecided as it had been all the afternoon, the rain now set about its work in good earnest, and flooded the streets and filled the gutters in quite a business way.

It did not spare the passers-by, either, but came down upon them to such extent, that even quite good-natured people, jostling together, and receiving the splashings of

the others' umbrellas in their boots, gave vent to angry and impatient exclamations. It wasn't the sort of weather to feel cheerful or pleasant by, and it was no wonder, therefore, that John Jasper's face was neither cheerful nor pleasant to look upon. He had neglected to provide himself with an umbrella, and the merciless rain, taking no heed of this fact, poured down upon his streaming hat quite as remorselessly as on the umbrellas jostling him. He had on no great coat, and the rain, easily penetrating the thin material of his summer garments, must have wetted him to the skin.

Perhaps it was this circumstance, pleasant to none, which forced, from time to time, a muttered oath from between his clenched teeth—awful and terrible to hear. Perhaps, on this account, his face wore so livid and fearful an expression that even those who passed him in the driving rain gave themselves extra trouble to go a step or two out of his way.

Unshorn, unkempt, unwashed, with shrunken cheeks and burning eyes, in which unholy fire gleamed, John Jasper, late choir-master of Cloisterham, at this present engaged in business which he kept secret, or in none at all, would not have been an agreeable

object of contemplation even in the sunshine, and was still less so under these unfavourable circumstances.

Time had dealt hardly with John Jasper, and aged him before his time. Consumed, as he was, and devoured by the passion always raging at his heart, one might have added twenty years to his real age, and feared no contradiction.

He had turned into one of the narrow streets behind Holborn, when a lean and shrivelled hand, belonging to an old woman, who had crept into the shelter of a doorway, and was crouching there for protection against the inclemency of the weather, seized a lappet of his coat as he strode by.

“Lor’, deary, don’t be in such a mortal hurry; don’t’ee now. I’ve been a lookin’ for ye, but couldn’t find ye nowheres. I tracked ye to hereabouts, and then I lost sight of ye. I was took with my cough, and that shakes me so bad that I loses sense and feelin’, deary. And when I come to myself you was wanished, you was. How bad you look, lovey. A’most at death’s door.”

And Mother Coombs coughed and spit, but still kept tight hold of the lappet she had seized.

“Let go of my coat, woman! What have

I to do with you? Let go, or I shall kill you."

"No, ye won't, deary. Not yet awhile," croaked the old woman, almost stifled with the violence of her cough, but clinging to him in spite of it. "There's other folks to kill afore me, and no time to lose in doing of it. I reckon I'll give ye the slip after all. What, strike a poor old soul, as come out in weather not fit for dogs, to save ye, deary?" For he had raised his clenched fist threateningly.

"What do you mean? Tell me what you mean or I will strangle you, she-devil that you are!"

"Now I knows my poppet! Now I recognises my pretty pet! I begin to think it weren't you, after all. You've grown so lovely since I see you last; and if the pretty ladies are not all in love with your handsome mug, it only shows their want of taste, deary. Strangle me? I know you could! You've got the knack of it, you see, and wouldn't be tryin' yer hand at it for the first time, my duck! Help us! Save us! Murder! Thieves!"

For, in his fury, he had grasped her skinny throat between his cruel hands, and was squeezing the breath out of her nostrils.

“Will you tell me now what you mean, villainous hag? Or shall I kick you to the devil on the spot?”

“No, lovey,” gasped the woman, who had scrambled to her feet during the short struggle, and who now stood panting and glaring at him with eyes full of hatred and malice, “not there, ’cause there you’d be a followin’ me quick and certain, and I’d rayther see the last on ye here.”

“Why do you exasperate me so, then? Don’t you see that I’m wet through and shaking with cold? Don’t you see that I am mad?”

“That conviction have been a coming into my brain,” answered the woman, composedly, “since I heerd ye, deary; for ye must be mad to behave so to me—to me, who with a single word, could get ye hung.”

And, as again with a bitter oath, he turned upon her, menacingly, she was in the middle of the street in a moment, in spite of her age and decrepitude; ready, if he touched her, to shriek for help.

“Accursed babbler! what have you got to say to me? Scum of hell! tell me what it is, or I swear I’ll shed your blood, even if it cost me my own. Speak, and you shall have a piece of gold for every word.”

“There now, that’s my poppet!” said the woman, drawing nearer again, and leering well satisfied into his face. “Now ye talks reason; and I’ll not only listen to ye, but I’ll tell ye what ye wants to know. ’Tis too far to the old court, deary, in this drenching rain; let us go into some tavern where we can warm ourselves and dry ourselves, and with a glass of summut hot, thaw the life-blood freezing in our veins. Is them your views, ducky?”

“As you will,” he answered, sullenly, following her into a low public-house; and a few minutes afterwards they were seated together in a room, where a fire was burning, with a couple of glasses and a bottle of something upon a table before them, from which the woman was quaffing with evident satisfaction.

“Now this is what I calls comfort,” began the woman. “It’s gin, and good stuff, too, deary. Take a glass, and it’ll warm ye and cheer ye up, for ye’re drefful low now; awful in the dumps, lovey. A pipe would do it better, but I haven’t got a bit of opium, more’s the pity! Customers is rare, since ye went, deary, and if ye could ha’ known how I’ve fretted and worried after ye, ye wouldn’t have had the heart to stay away so long; and

ye wouldn't have looked like that neither, if ye'd smoked a pipe, mixed by the only soul in the great city who knows how to do it. I might have starved but for a piece of good luck which come to me quite—"

"Quite what?" he inquired, mechanically, as she hesitated.

He had sunk into a chair by the fire, which was drawing out great clouds of steam from his drenched clothes; and either this or the warmth of the close, unaired room, misty still with the smoke from the pipes of its former occupants, seemed to have almost stupified him.

There was no trace now of the fury which had raged within him in the street. In a sort of lethargy, with his heavy head sunk low upon his breast, he appeared scarcely to heed, or to listen to what she was saying.

"Quite unexpected, deary; like manner in the wilderness. How pleasant it is here, ain't it? We're good friends now, ain't we, deary? You was riled, and so was I; for the wet, and the rain, and the cold, and the hunger is riling, deary, and we ain't the fust neither, that it's angered. But I knows my poppet! Bless ye, I wasn't born yesterday! And now, lovey, if ye's warmed and cheered, let's see the money ye spoke of."

“What did you mean by saying you could get me hung, woman?” he said at last, seemingly remembering that he had come there to hear that, and making a violent effort to overcome the stupor which was laming thought and sense.

“Softly, softly! lovey. Not so loud, not so quick! There’s ears outside which can hear, and tongues which can repeat! Ye always was too quick for me, but I goes slow and sure. I’m old enough to be yer granny, and I’m sure as I loves ye as sich, and I says: slow and sure. First let us see the money, ducky.”

“Curse you! Haven’t I told you that I mean to pay you? Do you doubt my word?”

“Lord love and save us; no, my poppet! You’s a man of your word, you is. A man of word and deed. I knows that. But the sight of the money stimmilates me, deary, gives me voice and langvidge. I’m a pore old soul, I am, and needs stimmilants. I can’t do without ’em. Just let’s see the gold.”

Drawing out a little bag of money, he laid it on the table before her, while she, with greedy, staring eyes, and clutching hands, grinned delightedly.

“Count it out, my duck! Let me see the

bright colour of it, and the sparkle. It ain't so good as opium, but it's the next best thing, for it will buy it, lovey. Ye promised me a bit of gold for every word, but I won't be so hard upon ye as that. *I ain't miserly.* I'll give ye a lot of words into the bargain and never reckon 'em up with ye. Count it, lovey, and don't ye be afeared of my takin' it before ye're satisfied. I've got summut to tell ye, remember that! I'll save ye from a tighter squeeze round yer throat than you giv' me, or than ever yer true love give you, I will.

But as he still remained silent and immovable, she went on again.

"Tell us, lovey, is ye married? Does yer true love, love ye still, or have ye got another?"

"What true love?"

"Lor', my memory's goin', deary; but I can make a shift to say, I reckon, 'cause you said it so often. Let me see: Polly, Jenny, Rosy. Yes, I know now. Of course, I do, I ought to. Pretty Rosy! Hangel Rosy! Henchanting Rosy!"

"Woman, if you continue to torture me," he cried, with a sudden return of fury and with gnashing teeth, "if you do not speak soon and explain what you mean, I swear to

you by the God above us, if there is one; by the devil in our hearts and all around us, that I will tear the heart out of your living body, and murder you where you sit."

"O, my ducky, how bad you needs the pipe! How you've been a wasting and a wearing yourself out for want of it! What a mortal pity as we ain't at 'ome where I could give ye one! Will ye count it out, or will ye not, deary?" (coaxingly).

Even in the midst of his mortal agony, and fierce eagerness to hear what she had to say, he had sense enough to feel that he must humour her; and with trembling hands he counted out the money, and set it before her; two little heaps of gold.

"Six big ones and eight little ones," counted the woman after him. "Ten big ones in all. It ain't much, deary."

"It is all I have."

"All you have! and the rich nevvie dead! The nevvie who left you his fortun', and his sweetheart into the bargain. O, fie upon ye!"

"What do you know about my nephew?"

"Don't touch me, deary. I'll screech if ye do, and tell 'em outside where the nevvie is, and who put him there. There's people seekin' of him 'igh and low, and if ye comes

a hinch nearer to me, I'll tell it to the whole world. O, but ye're a clever one, deary! A d—d clever one!"

"Have you issued from hell to bind me to the rack? Did Satan beget you?"

"If he did, you're my brother, lovey, sure and certain, and ought to be my friend. But I'll trust ye, deary. *I ain't niggardly.* Look you here! Don't stay another day in London, deary, but pack up all ye've got, and make off with yerself, across the seas to Ameriky, to cut off the scent, for—the hounds is after ye. They're strong upon ye, deary, and they've got noses so trained and fine that I bet ten to one, they've found out the secret of the grave—the secret buried so deep. Ha, ha! what a precious cute one, you is!"

He was so awful to look upon just then, with livid face, and grinding teeth, with foaming lips, and veins swollen to bursting, upon his burning forehead, that even the hardened woman, watching his every movement, shuddered as she sneered—

"What a pity it is, that yer true love, yer pretty Rosy, can't see you now, my poppet; she would be a'most ready to die of love for ye, I'm thinking."

"Woman, have pity on me, if you ever felt pity; and tell me what you know—or think

you know—and how you know it? and I will treble—quadruple, the sum lying there.”

“There! Now ye speaks reason,” retorted his companion, “and I can talk to ye like a reasonable being, and not like a lunatic. I tell ye, a fellow come to me to ferret and to find out what I knew, and I see from what he say, that they was a closing round ye on every side. But I kep’ my own counsel, and never told him, what I’d heerd ye say.”

“You lie, miserable hypocrite! you told him all. Not that it matters much. What was it, after all? Foolish visions! foolish dreams!”

“But two and two make four,” remarked the woman, cunningly, “and I reckon them spies knows how to put two and two together. And when they do, it makes a whole, not pleasant to think of, deary.”

“If you have betrayed me, miserable wretch! be sure of this, that whatever happens to me, you shall go to hell first.”

“Do you suppose,” she said, unconcernedly, “that I should put myself in your power, if I had betrayed ye? That I should warn ye, if I wished ye to be took? I’m old enough to be yer granny, as I said afore, and I loves ye as a mother. Take my advice and pack up yer things, and take them with ye to

Ameriky ; or, better still, leave them here for me to take care of for ye. And ye'll send me the money ye spake of, wont ye? Ye'll not forget? Give me yer watch, and the ring on yer finger as a pledge, and ye shall have them back agin when I gits the money."

"Have I not said that I would send it!"

"But ye might forgit, deary. And if ye did, I might be driv' to do something which would vex ye and me too, lovey. The worry might drive me to it."

Tearing off his watch and ring, he flung them upon the table before her, with a fierce oath, which seemed to blast his lips as it passed them, for it left them deadly white; and without another word, quitted the room and the house. The rain was still pouring, splashing, dripping down, but he neither felt nor heeded it. Baffled, daunted, all his hopes vanishing; all his evil deeds done in vain, and rising up to overwhelm him; remorseless still; full of hatred; full of raging fire, fed from hell itself, and which no rain, no nor ocean either, could subdue or quench; he paced the darkening and deserted streets till midnight, and not until all the clocks in the city had rung out the twelfth hour, did he turn his steps homeward. But not to find sleep or

rest. Like a caged panther, tameless, cruel, furious, he beat himself bloody against the bars which penned him in, and gnawed at his fetters, with hourly-increasing fury, until the day broke.

CHAPTER X.

A SUITOR BY THE RIVER.

ROSA, herself somewhat disconcerted by the unexpected arrival of Mr. Tartar, certainly succeeded to admiration in disconcerting that eager gentleman, by the coldness of the reception which she gave him; and if the warmth and kindness of the china shepherdess, and the hearty welcome bestowed on his former fag by the Reverend Septimus, combined with the snug and cosy fire, now regularly lighted in Mrs. Chrisparkle's little drawing-room every evening, where they assembled after dinner, had not somewhat acted as a restorative, Minor Canon Corner might have frozen the sea-lieutenant more effectually than the North Pole itself. Rosa plainly avoided every possibility of being left alone with him, even for a single moment; and when the Minor Canon was absent on clerical duty and Mrs. Chrisparkle left the room to attend to some household affair, the girl invariably found some urgent excuse for following her; remaining absent, until the china shepherdess was again ensconced in her

own arm chair by the fireside—that chair which in former years had been made use of by the dead husband, and which was now the favourite resting-place of his widow.

Now the old lady, who prided herself, and with reason, upon “being up to a thing or two,” and who had pretty nearly recovered from the first sharp mortification of having those plans which she had made for her son and Rosa so remorselessly frustrated, was, as almost all good women are, who have been themselves happy in the connubial state, a thorough matchmaker; and had already confided to the Revd. Sept that she saw which way the wind blew, and as the other was not to be (with a sigh) why, she really thought that nothing could be more suitable than this, (brightening up again). “And the wedding, my dear,” continued the china shepherdess, whose busy and active little brain had already even carried her so far ahead, and delighted she was, at the prospect, “must be from here, you know; and we will make merry and be merry together, and let by-gones be by-gones.” To which her son replied, laughing heartily, that he knew where to find a darling little scheme-maker, and delightful little busy-body, who couldn’t resist the temptation of putting sugar into other people’s pies, never

taking into account that perhaps they preferred them sour; adding, as he silenced the still rosy mouth, opened to rebuke him, with a kiss, "But you musn't count your chickens, before they're hatched, you know, ma; and there's many a slip—" after which original observations he betook himself to the Cathedral for vesper service, not in the least discomposed at the sight of a small hand, shaken at him threateningly, as a menace of the fate he merited.

For the frank and manly bearing of Mr. Tartar; his modest and prepossessing demeanour; his handsome face; and last, but not least, the love, respect, and even admiration, which he manifested for his old master, had won for him easily the heart of the china shepherdess. "It is the very thing," she said to herself, delightedly, "and a handsome couple they will be—not quite so handsome as if my Sept were the bridegroom, but there is only one Sept in the world." A momentary cloud crossed the sunny vision, as she remembered that Helena Landless would probably be asked to be bridesmaid to her friend, but she put that off for the present. "For if my boy *will* marry her, I suppose I must consent," she sighed. To tell the truth, never had the china shepherdess loved and

honoured her son more than since that first and only contest between them, in which he had prevailed. For it is a certain, though curious psychological fact, that every woman, however fond of power and impatient of control, likes—if his cause be a just and right one—really *likes* to feel the strong hand of her master.

So the old lady, in furtherance of this new scheme, which tended to considerably console her for the failure of the former one, made innumerable errands, and found innumerable excuses for leaving the two alone together, even hinting to her son to do the same. But up to this time, her manœuvres had not been attended by any signal success. She invariably found, on her return (after having spun out the time of her absence amply long enough to allow the sea-lieutenant to both pop and receive an answer to *the* question), Rosa gone, and Mr. Tartar, either sitting with mournful and disconcerted blue eyes upon the fading fire, or that he also had evacuated the field, and retired baffled to smoke a solitary and dismal cigar in the Revd. Sept's little book-room ; the only room in the house where smoking was not prohibited by the strict and peremptory mistress thereof.

Now the short visit was drawing rapidly

to its close, and Mr. Tartar had found no opportunity of speaking that word he had come to speak, with the full approbation of Mr. Chrisparkle, whom he had taken into his confidence; although aided and abetted by the clever old lady herself. For as yet Rosa had proved more than a match for the three allies, and had completely baffled them.

At last, Mrs. Chrisparkle hit upon a most sagacious plan—for such she considered it—which if successfully carried out, would, at any rate, compel the enemy to do battle in the open, without possibility of retreat; and which would end, she fervently hoped and believed, in a complete victory for her hero. And when her son gently insinuated, that perhaps Rosa herself was not so much in love with Mr. Tartar, as he, poor fellow, was with her; nay, his observation of the last day or two had almost induced him to believe that she must either have bestowed her heart on some one else, or that his friend had not been successful in obtaining possession of that priceless treasure, the old lady waxed wrathful and indignant. “If he supposed,” she said, “that he knew more about *some* things than she did—she would even go so far as to admit that he did (with ineffable condescension), at any rate in the matter of a girl’s

heart, she hoped she had the advantage of him. He had grown so very uppish lately, and so arrogant, that perhaps he would dispute this; but others, she knew well, would allow that her knowledge was more likely to be accurate than his. She had been, at a remote period—no, she wasn't going to pretend she was younger than she was, she scorned such folly, and would freely confess, that she was an *old* woman, though age, it appeared, in this year of our Lord, must bow to youth in the matter of experience—a girl herself (triumphant and incontestible fact), and she presumed that he would not venture to assert that he had ever been one, or would hardly expect (sarcastically) to be believed if he did."

Here, innocent Mr. Chrisparkle, quite confounded, protested that he had no such intention.

"Well, she hoped not, for his own sake, and therefore would hesitate no longer in asserting, that she ought to know better than he what a girl's heart was like, having had one of her own, another circumstance which she trusted he would not dispute."

"Of course I know that, ma; the warmest, most loving heart that ever beat."

"Very well, Sept. I am glad that I am believed so far, and hope I may add, without

fear of contradiction, that a girl's heart is a puzzle and an enigma."

"I do not doubt it, ma."

"The very fact," continued the china shepherdess, mollified by his submission, and cooling down a little, "that she avoids him, which she does—and so far, you are right—is a proof, an unerring proof to me, that she loves him in her heart. She never avoided you, Sept."

"No, ma, never."

"Nor you, her."

"No, ma," again assented her son.

"That circumstance, even if it had stood alone, ought to have opened my eyes," continued the old lady, "and I don't mind confessing, if you will not take advantage of it, Sept, that my wishes rather ran away with my discrimination there, and that I was a foolish old woman."

"The dearest old woman in the world! A most wonderful old woman!" put in her son affectionately.

"Be quiet, Sept; don't speak, unless you are spoken to, for I'm very much in earnest. I was going to tell you that I was just the same when I was a girl. Oh, how well I remember, as if it were but yesterday, the time when my poor James, your dear papa, was

courting me. Why, the sight of him in the distance was enough to set me flying. I remember, I used to take a certain walk," she continued, "where he—quite by accident—sometimes met me. But not one time in ten had I the courage to await his coming; I used to run into a little lane—that little shady lane! how it all comes back to me!—and hide myself there with beating heart, and burning face, until one day, at last, he took a fancy to the shady lane himself, and caught me there."

The Minor Canon laughed.

"Quite by accident, I assure you, my son. You don't suppose, do you, that either he or I would have been guilty of the impropriety of conniving to meet one another?"

Perhaps the Minor Canon thought that even this enormity was not without the range of possibility, but he prudently refrained from saying so.

"And at our little evening parties, when we young folks came together, he would try to sit by me and talk to me; and yet I would keep up a foolish chat with Miss This and Mr. That, even though I thought then and think now, that his style of conversation was the most eloquent and interesting in the world, only because the bliss of having him so near me made me tremble."

“That was odd, ma.”

“Not a bit, and that shows that you know nothing at all about it, silly boy! And that last time under the lime trees, when—when—”

“When he kissed you, ma?”

“I should like to have seen him at it! You don’t suppose, do you, Sept, that I should have permitted, or he would have ventured to attempt, any such familiarity? No, when he did me the honour of proposing himself as a candidate for my hand, I know that he dodged me twice round the garden, before he could get to speak to me, and then only, by popping out unexpectedly from behind a lilac bush, and catching me as I hurried past.”

As she raised her glowing face, dimpling and quivering still at the recollection of that glorious time of long ago, her son thought that any man might have been excused for dodging her twenty times round any garden, for such a purpose, and that it would have been impossible to blame his dead father, even if he had stolen a kiss from those tender lips.

After this little controversy, the Minor Canon ventured no more to oppose his mother’s plan; to wit, that Mr. Tartar should intercept Rosa in her solitary walk, which she

took every day when the weather permitted, persistently refusing an escort, and there, when no escape was possible, lay his case before her.

“And you will see, Sept,” cried the old lady, triumphing in anticipation, “how rightly I have judged her, and this time, my boy, I shall have the laugh of you, and not you of me.”

“I thought, ma,” said her son, roguishly, “that you did not approve of any such connived-at meetings, or even think them proper.”

But when the china shepherdess sternly requested him to repeat what he said, a little louder, her hearing not being so sharp as it had been, the Minor Canon was glad to take refuge behind a fit of coughing, so prolonged and violent, as to absorb the whole attention of the anxious mother, and prevent a repetition of her demand.

Of course these plans of the plotting china shepherdess were not served up quite *au naturel* to the love-stricken Mr. Tartar. They might have proved too strong for his weakened palate. But Mrs. Chrisparkle knew how to make her pot of lentiles savoury and irresistible. Bless your heart! She had nursed seven babies and lost six, some years

before Mr. Tartar had been thought of, and was a good thirty years his senior. She ought to have been therefore, and indisputably was, more than a match for him in diplomacy. It only required, on her part, an anxious look, out of the window, when Rosa had been gone some ten minutes; a fear (audacious little hypocrite!) that a storm was rising, and she believed that that naughty, naughty wilful little puss, had turned in the direction of the river. It was silly of her, no doubt, but she felt quite uneasy. The road was so lonely, and all sorts of bad people always about, and the days so short now. She wished she had exerted a little maternal authority and had forbidden it. She wished Sept were at home that she might send him after her. She would soundly scold the girl on her return, and insist on these lonely walks being abandoned for the future, etc., etc., until she had accomplished her purpose. What could poor Mr. Tartar do—sharing her apprehensions a thousand fold, for was not the being he loved best on earth, exposed to these many and various dangers, yet exceedingly doubtful of his reception by Rosa—what could the poor fellow do, but offer himself as a substitute for the failing Minor Canon? And yet he was no sooner on the

road, breathing the fresh, invigorating air of the bright autumn afternoon, than his depressed spirits rose, and hope and confidence came back to him. He even began to thank heaven in his heart for having given him this one more chance, almost believing that a merciful Providence was interfering specially on his behalf; although it was only Mrs. Chrisparkle and not the Higher Power, who had been taking active steps to bring about the meeting, and this excellent lady was not quite unerring in her judgment.

Who among us has any right to wonder at the infatuation of the sea-lieutenant, or to raise the stone to punish him? Not you, my friend, who once fell yourself a victim to the divine passion, and who dreamed the same fond, self-deceiving dreams as he, when your own love was in question.

Rosa had really turned in the direction of the river, as the china shepherdess had prognosticated; for that cunning lady, not caring to leave the affair to chance which might prove perverse, had wisely adopted the precaution of sending out the housemaid, Mary, to make sure of this. Not that she had taken that giddy damsel into her confidence, or dreamed of doing so. She was perfectly serene in her conviction that the maid wa

completely in the dark as to her little schemes. But Mary, "black eyed Polly," as her lover called her—Bill Bumpkins, coachman to His Reverence the Dean—was a sharp lassie, who had concocted little subterfuges of her own, many a time, and who had contrived to hoodwink missus, particularly in the matter of the said Bill Bumpkins, far more effectually, perhaps, than missus hoodwinked her. And Mary and cook both looked out admiringly from the kitchen window, as Mr. Tartar's tall, handsome form passed it, and—

"Ho, Hann!" said the former, "I wishes him good luck with hall my 'eart, for he is a gen'elman, as is a gen'elman, and the pretty dear too, and how he do remind me, Hann, of—of—" And Mary hid her blushing face on Hann's capacious bosom. For even in a kitchen may dwell sentiment, and sometimes truest love!

Mr. Tartar, flushing alternately with hope and with despair, soon caught sight of the little figure, walking slowly along the bank of the river. In another minute he would have gained upon her, and been by her side; but as he drew nearer, the fear of how she would receive him, the dread of losing all, even the hope of winning her, gained the ascendancy again, and kept him back.

As he gazed after her, wistfully, yearningly, he asked himself again the question he had asked himself so often, and which he could not satisfactorily answer even yet: "Did she, could she love him? She must—she *must*, because he loved her so much. Did not love beget love? And if her love for him was not so great as his for her, that he could not expect, that would be impossible, for no one—no one could love—could ever have loved, as he loved her—he would be satisfied with infinitely less, satisfied if she would only accept his deep affection, although unable to return it. He would lay down his life gladly, if it would give her pleasure. 'Oh, my darling! My darling!'" he sobbed, almost feeling as if his love was something tangible which could hurry forward, arrest her steps, and make her turn and come to him. If she did, would the happiness lend him wings to fly to her? or lame him where he stood? Perhaps, after all, her avoidance of him was only the charming coquetry natural to her sweet sex, which teaches them instinctively that to draw back is the strongest incentive to the lover to pursue. Yet in spite of this excellent reason for encouragement in the pursuit, he actually turned and fled, as she made a movement, as if about to retrace

her steps. But when he regained his courage, and looked after her, she was still going on slowly—sadly, as it seemed to him, as before. He climbed a portion of the hill leading to the Monastery ruin, and, taking a little path there which led in the direction she was going, rapidly pursued and overtook her; remaining far above, waiting till she should pass below him. He could see her face now, as she came on. How sad it was, and how down-cast! He fancied the soft cheek had lost much of its roundness since their first meeting, when her wonderful beauty had captivated and enthralled him; and the brilliant colour which still irradiated and made it beautiful, was too high for health and seemed to his sharp eyes, watching her with the keenness of love, to be a flush of pain. He felt that she had been weeping, and could see, so trained and sharpened were his own orbs by constant use at sea, at a distance incomprehensible to a landsman, that heavy tears still hung upon the long lashes, shading the dark beauty of her glorious eyes. She was in trouble, suffering! Good God! and he had been thinking of himself, and not of her, more shame for him! Rapidly he began the descent, and was about half-way down, when a small stone, slipping from under his im-

patient foot, fell rattling down the hill, and attracted her attention. She looked up, startled.

He saw, he felt, with sinking heart, and fainting hope, the look of troubled annoyance on her candid face, which she could not hide; but it was now too late to retreat, and with another spring or two he reached the ground, and stood beside her.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Bud,” he said, while the betraying colour dyed his face scarlet, “but—but—Mrs. Chrisparkle—”

As he stammered and hesitated, she repeated the word after him, interrogatively—

“Mrs. Chrisparkle?”

“The dear old lady grew anxious about you, feared your walk was ill-chosen for the time of year, and that a storm was coming,” he said, with effort.

The girl smiled slightly, as she pointed to the calm and peaceful evening sky.

“And that—that the road is solitary, and you might meet some rough and rude wanderer, who would frighten and distress you. She requested me, therefore, to go and seek you and bring you home.”

“I am not afraid,” answered Rosa. “I generally choose this walk when I am alone. I used to walk here with Eddy—my poor lost Eddy.”

The sea-lieutenant remained silent, though she eyed him narrowly, as if she expected him to speak.

“And I generally find here what I sometimes long for, and come to seek—solitude,” she said, further.

“Which I have rudely broken in upon,” remarked Mr. Tartar, sadly. “I beg your pardon again. Do you bid me go?”

The girl regarded him for a moment with keen attention, then said rapidly—

“No, we can go now, together. I have overstaid my time and wandered further than I intended. Let us make haste, Mr. Tartar, and walk fast, so that kind Mrs. Chrisparkle may not have time to grow seriously alarmed.”

“Will you take my arm, Miss Bud,” said the sea-lieutenant, humbly.

She had been very cruel to him, very! She had tried to freeze his glowing heart, and had poured cold water upon the fire of his love to quench it, with steady and unerring hand. Better far, she reasoned, to nip this hopeless passion in the bud, than allow it to burst out into full bloom and power, when it might defy her. But now her soft heart melted with pity as she looked upon his mournful and dejected face.

He had learned his lesson. Surely, surely he had learned his lesson! Was there any further need to torture him? Without a word she laid her small hand within his arm.

She would not have done so had she known the result. But she was young, poor child! and inexperienced, and had no one to counsel her.

What were all her cold words and actions compared to the ineffable bliss of that slight touch upon his arm.

The fire of love, never quenched, burnt up strong and high again. To the winds with reason and cruel doubts and fears. He who will win all, must risk all.

They were alone together; her magical touch thrilling heart and soul, her delicate head almost resting on his shoulder.

"Rosa," he said, stopping abruptly, and looking down upon her grave, sweet face, half raised to his, and whitening with fear of what she felt was coming, in spite of all she had done to prevent it, "Rosa, I *must* say what I came to say; *must* speak out what is in my heart; forgive me if I pain you, for I love you, Rosa."

Hastily withdrawing her hand from his, the girl burst into a passion of tears. Heavy drops oozed through the slender fingers,

covering her convulsed face, and rained down upon the ground.

“Oh, Rosa,” he went on, “how weak and powerless are words to express what we mean. I have thought of some such scene between us for weeks and months, and now can say nothing more than that simple phrase: ‘I love you.’ How much, how earnestly, how devotedly, I cannot put in words.”

“Oh, I am so sorry,” sobbed the girl; “so unhappy, and so grieved.”

As he sighed bitterly and despairingly, the rising wind seemed to echo the mournful sound, and they both shivered as the sun went down, and a mist coming slowly up, crept stealthily over the river.

“Can you give me no hope, Rosa?”

“It would be cruel to give you hope,” she said, raising her tear-stained and agitated face, and struggling to regain her composure, “for it is quite, quite hopeless. I dare not love you.”

Even as she spoke, her eyes wandered away from his, in the direction from whence she had been coming, and she shuddered and covered her face again with her hand, as if she saw something there to terrify her. He looked back also, for a moment; and he, too, fancied he saw a face, rising out of the

mist, and glaring at them menacingly. But though he advanced a few steps to make sure, he saw nothing more. No wonder that his eyes played him false, for they were dim with tears.

“Dare not, Rosa? Why?”

“Hush, do not ask me. I dare not, Mr. Tartar, and I do not—I will not. Do not question me further. I shall never marry, never! Leave me to my fate. Pity, and forgive me!”

“Forgive you, Rosa! I have nothing to forgive. I thank God that He has let me love you. I thank God for every minute we have spent together. Perhaps the time may come when your feelings will change towards me; mine never will towards you.”

“Do not think of that,” she said hurriedly, and pressing her hands together earnestly, “for it is impossible; it can never be. I do not love you; and if I were free instead of bound, I think I should say the same, for I have learned the misery of an engagement without true, deep love, by sad, sad experience, and would never risk it again.”

“How can you be bound, Rosa? Who has power to bind you?”

“My own conviction of what is right,” she said, with sad seriousness. “My own un-

alterable will. Promise me never to renew this topic. It would be useless. Only a source of grief and misery to me, and to you also, I fear. Promise me."

"I promise," he answered in a tone of unutterable sadness, far even more forcibly than her words; her look, her whole mien, showed him that all was over. He knew he was ringing a death-knell as he spoke, the knell of first true love in his heart. But what mattered his fate compared to hers? Would he not willingly offer himself up to give her happiness? Like a brave soldier, not an eyelash quivered, as he struck down his own most cherished hopes, and buried them for ever.

"We must not see each other again," continued Rosa, weeping afresh. "At least, not for a long, long time, and until the pain we are both now suffering is over and forgotten. I thank you for your generous love; love too generous to urge itself upon me, and give me needless pain. I am a poor little ignorant thing," she added, smiling faintly, and putting out her small hand; "but believe me, I know how to appreciate that, and to estimate its true nobility."

He took the little tender hand, and pressed it reverently to his lips. He dared not speak,

or he must have broken down and given way to an unmanly weakness, which would only have distressed her. But how hard it was to bear !

Never had she appeared to him so lovely and so lovable. The knowledge of the inestimable worth of the jewel he had longed to possess, heightened the poignancy of his suffering.

“And now let us part,” continued the girl. Her voice was faint, and she felt weak and dizzy, but she longed to be alone. “Leave me !” she said. “I must have time to collect myself, and I would rather you went on before me.”

He hesitated. It was twilight already, and the night gathering.

“Let me first bring you home, Miss Bud, I implore you.”

“No, no !” she cried, in a sort of agony ; “I must be alone. I cannot go back yet to Minor Canon Corner. Look, there are the lights of the city before us, and I am perfectly safe. I have been here alone many times before, and I shall follow you in a few minutes. Leave me, I beseech you !”

Still he lingered, uneasy and undecided. A dread of—he knew not what, fell heavily upon him. He looked back along the path

by the river, with a strange, undefinable, unaccustomed sense of fear.

But his far-seeing eyes could find no tangible reason for such a feeling. The path lay plainly visible by the light of the rising moon which shone brighter every moment, and was empty and deserted. Only over the placid river, flowing calmly towards the ocean, lay the autumn mist.

And they were so close to the city that they could hear the hum of its population. There was no outward reason apparently for his shuddering—shuddering, as old wives say, as if some one were walking over his grave.

“Leave me !” said the weeping girl again.

He had no resource but to obey. No shadow of right to force his company upon her, or compel her to return with him.

Begging her, therefore, to follow him as soon as possible, and with a solemn good-by for ever, as he thought ; with heavy heart and wounded soul, he went away towards the city, and left her to the solitude she desired.

How could he imagine, how was it possible for him to imagine, that his doing so would become a source of bitter self-reproach, and make one of the saddest memories of his life ?

CHAPTER XI.

A HOUSE FULL OF MUDDLES.

WEARY and worn out from futile passion and hopeless fury, John Jasper sat solitary and friendless in his lodgings, in a narrow, mean street behind Holborn, and watched, with bloodshot and haggard eyes, the advent of the coming day. It had ceased raining during the night, and the fitful wind, which "bloweth where it listeth," had shifted its course, too, and no longer howled and roared through the city, but lisped gentle dreamy melodies of peace and goodwill. The sun, which shineth alike on the just and on the unjust, rose with beaming countenance, and smiling in at the dark chamber where sat John Jasper, brought out into strong relief hard, cruel lines about his mouth and eyes, invisible before; and seemed to point at him with its bright finger, as who would say: "Take notice of these signs and tokens which not Time, but Crime, hath graven! For this purpose, I still shine upon this man, to point him out as one to be avoided."

As the day advanced, and the sounds

of busy life outside grew more and more frequent, increasing to a perfect and bewildering hubbub, John Jasper got up wearily from the hard sofa on which he had been resting, and began to make preparations for his toilette. He washed himself, for the first time for days, with great care and deliberation; then shaved away all hair from cheeks and chin, not even sparing his luxuriant whiskers, and not desisting until he was as closely shorn as a Catholic Priest. Only a blue shadow on those parts of his face thus unexpectedly exposed to public view gave token of what had been, and what might be again. His trembling and unnerved hand played him an ugly trick, though, just at last, and with the sharp razor inflicted a sharp cut upon his cheek, from which the blood flowed freely. With an awful curse, he flung away the instrument, and stilling the flow of blood, covered the wound with a bit of sticking-plaster, which did not tend to diminish the sinister and lowering expression of his face. He then arrayed himself in a new shirt, new waistcoat, spick and span new coat and trousers—all of which articles he took out of a drawer he had unlocked, and which had been lying there together, apparently in readiness for a special occasion, which had

now arrived. These preparations completed, he further donned a new collar and new tie, and finally took a careful survey of himself in the looking-glass. Notwithstanding the newness and respectability of his apparel, and the cleanliness of his person, the result did not appear, even to himself, to be satisfactory. Even his personal vanity, if he possessed any of this attribute, could not help him to deny the fact—which the dingy and dirty looking-glass failed to conceal—that he was not pleasant to look at. The jetty blackness of his hair; the deep, dark shadows under his eyes; the lurid light which shone out of those eyes themselves, contrasted in a sinister and Mephistophelian manner with the sallow and sickly pallor of his face. He had been a good-looking man a few months ago; he was a very ill-looking man now.

His eyes wandered away from that taunting reflection of himself in the mirror, and fell upon the open razor, lying still upon the table. A sudden and impulsive thought rushed into his brain, and the truthful looking-glass reflected back the hot colour which instantaneously suffused his livid face. Should he end the struggle then and there?—that thing was sharp enough! A scratch across his throat, one vein severed at his wrist, and

the world and its troubles, its tortures and its fierce conflicts, would flow away from him for ever with his flowing blood. He had heard that it was an easy death to die. He took up the razor, and felt its keen, sharp edge.

But the next moment he dashed it down again with an oath, "What, lose her, and let them triumph?" he muttered. "No, not so long as there is a devil to help me."

Going up to the shabby mantel-piece, beside which hung a moth-eaten and nearly worn out bell-rope, he gave the summons for his breakfast.

The only result attendant on this was a great sound of scamping and scuttling below-stairs, and cries of, "Betsey, where air you? Lazy wixin!" and a storm of sobs and reproaches. He waited another ten minutes, with tolerable patience, then rang again.

This time the moth-eaten and decayed bell-rope broke off in his hand, and a sound of shuffling feet outside warned him that his landlady was approaching. He seated himself close to the window, apparently absorbed in the prospect, and did not turn round as she entered. She would notice the loss of his facial adornments, and he preferred she should not.

Not that Mrs. Muddle was the sort of person to attach any importance to this circumstance, or even to heed it. Fat, weak-eyed, addle-headed, obtuse ; all her faculties were absorbed into the daily struggle to find the means of living for herself and family, and no full-blooded aristocrat could have been less capable of surprise than she. Her share of the leaven of feminine curiosity, apt to turn so insufferably sour in single individuals of her sex, had been distributed into so much bread for childish stomachs, as to become perfectly innoxious in this careworn mother. Her only excitement, the harmless one of "giving it" to Betsey, her myrmidon, in words, and "giving it" to her unruly progeny in cuffs and raps, distributed impartially all round on any and every domestic emergency, such as the kettle boiling over ; or one of the numerous Tommies tumbling down the stairs ; or Muddle coming in "put out," Mrs. Muddle would have been hardly capable of feeling more than a transient emotion if her lodger had cut off his head instead of his beard, and would certainly have never wondered, why.

"Which, sir, if I'm not mistook, you rung, sir."

Not caring to explain that he had rung

twice, and already waited a most unreasonable time, Mr. Jasper, still absorbed in his contemplation of human nature in the street below, answered, laconically : " Breakfast."

" Begging your parding, sir, for keeping you a waiting for it, but the baby, bless its little 'art ! have been a screechin' and a wailin' the livelong night ('tis the doubles a coming through, at last), and wakin' me and Muddle hup the moment we'd a dropped off. Did you speak, sir ? "

Mr. Jasper hadn't spoken a word, and the landlady never thought he had. The question was only introduced to enable him to do so, if he should wish. But, he taking no notice of this opening, Mrs. Muddle went on again—

" I've been a giving it to Betsey, sir, right and left. A lazy 'ussy, as would sleep till Doomsday, if I didn't get up first to wake her ; though 'ow she can 'ave the 'art to lie a-bed so long, and me a nussing my thirteenth, is more than me and Muddle can imagine."

Another pause, again unbroken by Mr. Jasper. The landlady continued (she imagined, poor soul ! that she was agreeably filling up the time till the kettle should boil, and preventing the possibility of her lodger growing impatient)—

" There's little Tommy, too, as can't run

off yet, though he's as fine a boy as ever come into the world, and thrives wonderful. But it all goes into his body, the victuals does, which is too heavy for the little legs of him. Only yesterday, when you was out, he fell downstairs, from top to bottom, he did, (I gived it to him well, afterwards), and was picked up by Mrs. Perkins, as was buying a hounce of tea in the shop. But when she says 'twas a shame as he wasn't better looked after, and might have broke every bone in his body, she says, I ups and outs with it, and tells her what's what—as how should she know how to bring up children, as never had one in her life. 'Mrs. Perkins,' says I, 'you can't make sixteen month three year, not if you tries to, hever so.' ”

“Mrs. Muddle,” interposed Mr. Jasper, cutting through her words with a voice as sharp as a knife, “I am going away for a few days on a journey. I shall leave all my things here, because I am coming back again; but I shall give you a month's payment in advance. The money is lying ready for you there, upon the chimney-piece.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Mrs. Muddle, pocketing the few bits of gold with satisfaction. (Money was proverbially scarce in the Muddle household, and could be compared

with the children only in this sort of inverted way, inasmuch as it decreased in proportion as they grew and multiplied). "It would ill become me as a mother to refuse to take it, with ten on 'em as ready for their victuals as any ten children in the world, and three on 'em torn from the bereaved harms of their parients to a hearly grave."

And here, as Betsey, in shrill accents, proclaimed that "the kittle was a bilin'," the landlady retreated, finding plenty of family affairs below to occupy her attention ; for that "hordacious" Betsey had been "giving it" to the young ones on her own account, and it was first necessary that she should "catch it" for having presumed to do so, and then that the young ones should "catch it" for having presumed to receive it. For, it is a curious circumstance, that however often and severely a cat may paw her kittens, or a mother her progeny, both exhibit the strongest disapproval of such proceeding on the part of another.

But at last the landlady conveyed upstairs, with her own fair hands, the breakfast for her lodger—a doughy roll, a pat of speckled butter, farther adorned with a thumb mark, and a pot of tea ; and deposited these luxuries on the table of the little sitting-room ; then

she shuffled downstairs again to the kitchen, where, in the company of a meek little man, the above-mentioned Muddle, summoned for this purpose from the shop, she partook of breakfast, and imparted to the baby its natural nourishment ; while Betsey, at a side table, alternately stopped her own mouth, and those of the troop of hungry Tommies, with bread and butter, crusts of the toast from the other table, and such sips of tea as were graciously accorded to them ; and vanished peace came back to the Muddle household.

Downstairs, at least ! Upstairs, at the board of John Jasper, only a pause more terrific than any combat, more awful than the height of the conflict. For it portended and shadowed forth something far worse. Like the pause of the cruel panther before the fatal spring ; like the pause in the thunderstorm before the murderous bolt falls ; such peace, if peace it were, filled the heart of John Jasper.

He ate little, and that little without appetite. The tea was weak and tasteless, the roll doughy, the butter, with that filthy thumb-mark, and also by reason of its own intrinsic properties, disgusting. But the most costly viands would have proved inefficient to tempt him this morning.

Some inward excitement destroyed appetite, and rose up chokingly within him in protest against food. Bitter as wormwood, tasteless as ashes, his soul revolted against it, and he turned from it in disgust. After a mouthful or two he abandoned the effort.

But he must compose and strengthen himself in some way. His heart's rapid beating almost deprived him of his senses ; his pulse throbbed feverishly, and his head reeled dizzily.

He poured himself out a glass of the strongest brandy, and took a deep, long draught. Ah, that was what he needed ! It gave him new strength and new courage. His hand became more steady ; his drooping form straightened itself. He was able to complete his preparations.

Unlocking another drawer, he took out of it a small box, padlocked. It contained money—bank notes ; gold and silver in little rolls.

He counted it out with a hand almost firm and steady now, and his face assumed a satisfied and triumphant expression as he did so.

“It is enough !” he said in a low voice. “The proceeds of the sale of my connection in Cloisterham ; that money which the infernal lawyer made such difficulty about

giving me; the little I have saved by long years of drudgery. Curse it all and blast it! No, bless it, for it is enough!"

He tied the notes together and put them in the breast pocket of his coat; distributed the rolls of gold in other receptacles about his person, and dropped the silver loose into the pockets of his trousers; smiling and singing in a low, sweet voice as he did so. He was quite calm and serene now; and might have been simply dressing himself for service at the Cathedral, so composed and orderly was his demeanour.

He was tolerably well weighted by this time, but he further added a heavily-loaded revolver to his accoutrements, and drank another deep draught of brandy. "The pipe would stupify me," he said.

He looked round the room again, with a casual glance at the mirror, reflecting back an image, at which the image itself shuddered, and then carefully and methodically put his room in order.

He folded up the clothes he had worn the evening before; they were still wet and splashed with mud and filth, but he laid them tidily in a drawer, notwithstanding. He disarranged the bed, upon which he had not rested, making a deep indentation in the pil-

low and in the middle, and even gathered together the hair which he had cut off from his face, and, wrapping it in a bit of paper, stuffed it up the chimney.

Then he opened the window to let in as fresh air as the street afforded; inducted himself into a new great coat, into the pocket of which he put a new pocket handkerchief, and completed his preparations by placing on his head a soft felt hat, which he drew low over his eyes; then crept softly downstairs.

The house was situated in a close, narrow street, among a perfect lacework of streets behind Holborn, and chosen by Mr. Jasper as a suitable lodging-house, on account of its proximity to Staple Inn; where, though he also had hired a room, it did not suit him to be seen always.

For reasons of his own—perhaps only to stretch his cramped limbs after long and close watching of the house which Neville and Helena inhabited, or of that other one, brooded over by the guardian spirit of P. J.T.—Mr. Jasper never went straight from one place to the other, but dodged in and out of the intricate streets, in a manner which must have proved fatal to the hopes of any one desirous of overtaking him; and, passing the front of the Muddle habitation with the in-

difference of one to whom it was an unknown spot, would be round the corner and in at the little back yard before you could say Jack Robinson!

That little back yard was a place to vanish in, as mysteriously as down the most cunningly concealed trap-door. It was usually divided into lanes and compartments by the Muddle family linen, and always discordant and unearthly with yells and howls issuing from the legion of little Muddles, who scratched each other's faces, or kicked each other's shins there, according to their sex, with touching infantile sportiveness.

Sometimes John Jasper would reverse these proceedings, and leaving the back yard to its own devices, enter the little shop in the front, with a solemn and dignified gait, letting his boots creak, after the manner of an unlimited customer, and wringing the heart of the patient Muddle, who for one brief moment had indulged in that delightful vision.

This little gloomy shop, in which the landlord spent his life, only quitting it for meals and bed (sharing the latter—by no means too capacious—with Mrs. Muddle—who might have been halved and still made two tolerable-sized individuals of—and those never-satisfied and voracious infants, the baby and little

Tommy—and of which only the boards were his portion) this little dark, gloomy shop was a perfect paradise to the meek little man who appeared to have been sent into the world only to confer his name on an unlimited number of successors, for here he could indulge in a stealthy pinch of that snuff which he offered to an exceedingly rare ready-money public, or snooze behind the counter, compensating himself somewhat for his sleepless nights, and, best of all, be safe from intrusion by his noisy progeny. For, in the window stood a dish of mouldy gingerbread, and under the counter a box containing raisins, which at some remote period had been fresh, and the maternal mandate had gone forth that any young Muddle venturing to penetrate that sanctuary would do so at the peril of his life.

John Jasper had passed Muddle, nodding in his corner, and was half-way down the street before the landlord had succeeded in quite opening his eyes.

Having made his way at last into another street, John Jasper took it more easily, returning upon his own footsteps once or twice, until he had made certain that he was not followed. Then, and not till then, he went on apace.

Threading street after street, in the same steady, resolute manner, he did not once avail himself of any of the public conveyances, which continually rattled past him, and which he might have done easily, but kept on, always on foot, until he had reached the extreme outskirts of the great city ; when he began to feel quite suddenly that his strength was failing him.

He had stopped to rest nowhere, and eaten nothing ; and having made a great many unnecessary turns, to mystify any one who might take a fancy to follow him, he found to his surprise and alarm that it was close upon the sunset ; that all the fictitious strength which the brandy had given him was evaporated quite ; that he was weary to death from his long march, and famishing.

This fact came upon him so suddenly and overpoweringly that he had no time to take any measures to avert the catastrophe before it came.

The road before him suddenly began to heave and surge, like the waters of a great sea ; a black shroud seemed to envelop him from head to foot ; he fancied for a moment that he was being wafted away to an unknown region ; then thought and feeling left him utterly, and he sank heavily to the ground.

He could have been insensible but a few minutes, when he opened his eyes again. At first he could see nothing, and in an agony of fear, believed that he had been struck blind. But, feebly grasping in the air for something to catch hold of, and help him up, he encountered a helping hand, and the next moment not only felt, but saw, a man standing by his side.

An old man, shabby and palsied, whose hand shook and teeth chattered as he addressed him—

“Have you hurt yourself? You fell heavy, master. Have you had a faint, or a drop too much? (with a feeble grin.) No offence, master. It may happen to the best on us, when we’ve got the money for the drink.”

“I’ve had a fainting fit, I fear. I’ve come a long way to-day.”

“Sure, sure, master! No offence! I wish I had the money for the drop too much. I wouldn’t stick at the drop, and never did, master. There’s a ’pothecary close by; as good as a doctor, master. Shall I call un?”

“No, no! It’s nothing. I’m used to it. I’m better now. Quite well again. I can stand, you see.”

“As you will, master. It ain’t for the likes of me to contradict you. Ned Nobbles knows his place.”

But John Jasper still shook and trembled, and he clung to the old man—a very indifferent support—or he would have fallen again. It was evident that he could go no further without food and rest.

“Is there a decent public-house anywhere about here where I can get a bed and something fit to eat?”

“Yes, sure,” the old man answered, “as decent a house, and as affable a landlady as you might meet with on a day’s march; and fust-rate beer. ’Twas the place of all others where Ned Nobbles liked to be, and where, with a well-lined pocket, you hadn’t no call to envy the gods.”

And the old man tottered on before, with a faint hope kindling in his withered old heart that the well-dressed stranger would stand treat, surely; while John Jasper tottered on after him, with a feebler gait, and still more trembling limbs than the grey-haired veteran of eighty-five.

“Here, friend, drink a couple of glasses in the bar for my reckoning,” said Mr. Jasper, when they got there, putting half-a-crown into the old man’s hand.

“Thank ye kindly, master. Time was when Ned Nobbles could have treated ye, and been proud to do it, but ill-fortune have brought un low, and he ain’t above acceptin’ of a trifle now.”

And the bustling landlady coming out with a smiling remonstrance for Ned Nobbles—quickly changed to a smiling assent at the sight of the Queen’s head upon the coin, which he held up triumphantly—had comprehended the state of things, in a twinkling; had a glass of something to set the poor gentleman upon his feet again, in a trice; and was giving directions to an unseen individual in the kitchen, and an unseen individual in the upper regions, to get the supper ready, and to prepare No. 3 for a “gentleman as is going to stay the night,” before you could draw your first delighted breath of satisfaction at the joviality of her appearance.

In half an hour John Jasper was partaking of the supper prepared for him—as good and well-cooked a supper as the heart, or rather the palate of man could desire—at first greedily, till the first sharp pangs of hunger were appeased; then more deliberately; and after imbibing for a second time a glass of a mixture, fragrant to smell, delicious to taste, and possessing, as the

radiant hostess said, looking on smilingly as he swallowed it, properties so narcotic that he was safe for a good night's rest, which it would be superfluous to further wish him, he staggered up stairs to No. 3, and had scarcely laid himself between the well-aired sheets, when sleep, heavy and dreamless—such sleep as he had not enjoyed for months—fell upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE HIGH ROAD TO CLOISTERHAM.

FOR many hours, John Jasper lay prostrate in a heavy and dreamless sleep, or, if, as some learned in such things tell us, the brain is more hardly dealt with than the body, that although the latter may enjoy repose, the former does never, and that we think or dream always—at any rate, one dream swallowed up and effaced the foregoing one, and they left no impression which he could retain when he awoke. But towards morning, when the cocks began to crow, and the horses to grow restless in their stables; when the bright-eyed birds drew their pretty heads out of their snug feathers, and twitted and chirped in expectation of the coming day; when the active landlady, already in her stockings, and smiling from purest habit, rang the bell for the lazy maids, and began to poke and harass her more sluggardly mate, John Jasper had a dream.

He dreamed that he was back again in Cloisterham, and that the bells were ringing for early service in the Cathedral; that Mrs.

Tope was moving softly in the next room, getting his breakfast—how deliciously and temptingly the fragrant scent of the coffee tickled his nose!—that the dreadful and accusing past was only a cruel nightmare which had brooded over him during the long night, and which would quite vanish with the daylight; that he was innocent and happy, glad once more and joyous; that his nephew—what an awful dream he had had about him; thank God, that it was over!—was standing by his bedside, laughing. He heard him call him with his fresh young voice—

“Jack, old boy, wake up, ’tis morning! Get up, lazy fellow!”

He threw back the bed clothes, started up, sprang vigorously out of bed, and hurried, still half-asleep, to the window to draw up the blind, for it was still nearly quite dark. It was about six o’clock, and there was a fresh, healthful and invigorating “feel” in the air. In the east, the day was breaking.

Suddenly, with a start and a shiver, with a rush of accusing blood to his damp forehead, the glorious vision vanished. With the old, old weight upon his heart and soul, which had been lightened for a moment, the dread reality came back. Covering his face with his guilty hands, the stains on which nothing

could efface, he knew again where he was, and what he was.

There are many who have felt the inexpressible relief and bliss which fills the heart, when waking up from a dream of terror and anguish, with the cold sweat of fear upon the brow, with convulsive shudderings in the limbs, and an indescribable terror weighing down every faculty, as with leaden weights, we come back to the delightful knowledge, that it is only a foolish dream,—a chimera, which has been haunting us, probably induced by an indigestible supper, or an uncomfortable position; that we are still happy and honoured; that the sunshine is trying to peep through our own snug window curtains, and not through prison bars; that the wife of our affections, whom we dreamed of—we shudder still at the recollection!—as foully murdered, is lying, sweetly sleeping at our side; that our darling little cherubs, whom we fancied croup had carried off victims, are roaring lustily at that very moment overhead (we hear nurse scolding them, what a mercy Lucy does not); that the spectre which appalled is laid again, and that we can doze off once more, on the other side—for it would be a crying shame to rouse our darling Lucy; who does not know the bliss of such a waking!

Who can imagine, being innocent, the agony of mind, the horror of himself, which a lost soul must feel, who, having dreamed himself guiltless, wakes up guilty?

John Jasper had awakened to the full misery of such a feeling. To the bitter dregs, he must quaff the cup which he had mixed. Yet perhaps an all merciful Heaven sent the vision as a last warning to desist. Did the guardian angel given him at his birth, come back once more after long absence and point with gentle hand to repentance, as a last hope of rescue? Perhaps even to John Jasper, standing barefoot in the middle of the little bedroom, looking with clenched hands, and wide-open horror-struck eyes upon the sun rising solemnly in the east, and tinging the heavens with the glory of its presence,—perhaps even to his benighted soul, a warning voice was speaking, “Turn back upon the path which thou art treading! Repent of the sins which thou hast committed, in sackcloth and in ashes, and sin no more! Even for sinners lost as thee, Heaven can find a refuge!” Merciful God! Once upon a time, long, long ago, he had loved to look upon the rising sun, and rejoiced—he also—in the sunshine.

Glorious and majestic rose the orb of day,

looking down in solemn splendour upon the earth which it quickened. No wonder that the ancients worshipped and bowed down before it. No wonder that to them, this sun, life-giving and life-restoring, was not alone an emblem of the God who made it, but that God Himself. Floating up into the blue heaven, it rose grandly; higher, and ever higher. The great wonder, which takes place every morning, before the eyes of the indifferent and unobserving, before the eyes of scoffers and scorers, before the eyes of believers and unbelievers, took place once more. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

But all light was powerless to lighten the darkness of John Jasper. If, for one moment, a fitful ray fell upon his black soul, showing him dimly the depth of its depravity, it soon went out again. If, for one moment, his guardian angel made a last effort to rescue him, he was foiled in the attempt, and fled away for ever.

He laughed loud and recklessly: strength had come back to him with the morning light, and that was all he cared for, strength to do the evil he desired.

He dressed himself, went downstairs, and ordered breakfast. It was soon ready, and

he partook thereof, if not heartily, at any rate abundantly, for he was determined not to run the risk again of fainting on the road. Then he paid the ever-smiling landlady his modest bill, and set off to walk again, taking the high road which led to Cloisterham.

It was not strange that he should feel a wish to revisit his old home, and old acquaintances ; but it was singular that he should choose to walk there, when the place was so easily accessible by means of the railroad and the coach ; or if, for old acquaintance sake, he preferred the road upon which he had trudged weary footed many a time in his younger days, but with a lighter heart then, why did he not hire a vehicle of some kind, and drive there ? Why, indeed ?

He had not gone very far, when he saw before him a young man, also walking in the same direction, who turned round at the sound of footsteps behind him, and then stooped to pick a late flower by the hedge-side. A dark, spare man with shabby coat, and blue spectacles. John Jasper knew the man, or thought he did. If he were not much mistaken, it was the same young fellow, whom he had seen go in and out of Staple Inn sometimes, when he was on the watch there. He had ascertained by direct in-

quiries of the porter in charge of the gate—who had no objection to a shilling now and then, though the information he could give in return was very scant—that the young man was the new clerk of Mr. Grewgious ; that nobody knew anything further about him, good or bad, except that he was always punctual and always melancholy. “Crossed in love, maybe,” said the porter jocosely, “them young chaps takes such things terrible to ’eart the fust time, and goes downright melancholy mad ; but Lord love you ! it don’t last long ; and the second time it don’t hurt so much, you see,” (with a wink, intended to express that he had large experience in this respect himself, and spoke from profound personal knowledge.)

John Jasper eyed the young man, or rather the back of the young man, narrowly (for he was still engaged in picking leaves and flowers) as he recalled the porter’s observations. This was a long way from Staple Inn, and past the hour for the usual attendance at the office. What the devil was he doing here ?

Nothing, apparently, or only botanising. And as John Jasper passed him, he turned back again, and went slowly in the direction of the city. Who was he like ? Who did he remind him of, in gait and carriage ? although

he walked more slowly, and had not the elastic spring of the other. Bah! why must *he* always, sleeping and waking, be so constantly in his thoughts; he was quiet for ever now; could never more drive him mad by boyish boasting of his own good fortune and happiness, so cruel a contrast to his own; for he (persiffling the grand Bible words so familiar to him in the church, with a wicked sneer) “had put on immortality.”

Forgetting in this new groove of thought, the man whose presence had sent him there, he began to wonder, if, after all, his fears were not driving him too fast; if the woman had not lied, when she said, the hounds were after him—mother of lies that she was! He had always had this last plan in reserve, if the others should fail; but it would be an infernal pity, if later events should prove that he might still have completed that web, at which he had been weaving so ceaselessly, and which was almost ready to catch and hold the man for whom it was intended, in its murderous meshes. There were a hundred chances to one that she had lied, in order to extort money from him.

But if she had not? If she had told the truth for the first time in her life (and that she knew his secret, he could not doubt, after

what she had said ; he must have blabbed it out himself under the influence of that accursed opium) what then ? what then ?

Why then, delay would have been madness and almost surely fatal to his hopes. All the labours of his sleepless nights and weary days would have been utterly in vain. He had made so certain, that he had closely shut the door, and effectually blocked up all the windows and crannies by which suspicion might enter, and now—now he must find, that in the dead of night, when no one could have dreamed her on the look out, he had opened the carefully locked and barricaded door, and let her in himself.

A sort of fury against his own person, which had been guilty of such unpardonable weakness, overcame him for a moment, and he struck himself violently in the face with his clenched fist. His own enemy once more, for the blood spurted from his nose, and dropped down upon his new tie and spotless waistcoat ! He shuddered as he saw what he had done, but it was too late now. He was a marked man again ; blood upon his face and hands ; blood staining his new clothes ; crimsoning the white handkerchief which he drew out to still it—blood everywhere.

It was awful, sickening. He not only smelt,

but tasted it. The instinctive aversion which almost every human being feels at the sight of blood, which is the life, he, the murderer, felt no less than others. He sat down on a milestone by the road, with closed eyes, and almost fainting. When he recovered himself sufficiently to try and wipe away the stains, they were dry already. He only succeeded in removing the marks from his face and hands with the bloody handkerchief, which he put into his pocket, buttoning his great coat (which for greater ease in walking, for the day was bright and warm, he had worn loose) over the ugly stains upon his waistcoat.

Shine down upon him, oh sun, in all thy splendour! Bring out into strong relief the sinister and cruel lines upon his beardless face! Point at him with thy bright finger, and show him up to the whole world, as a dangerous man—a murderous man—a man to be avoided!

Never mind! Even if the hounds were after him, they were a long way behind. A whole day in arrear, at all events. He would baffle them yet, and obtain what he wanted in spite of them. Ha, ha, he *was* baffling them at that moment!

Not so fast, John Jasper! Who are these two individuals, rough of coat and rough of

tongue, though endeavouring to soften the latter, out of deference to a smiling, radiant little landlady, who is mixing with her own fair hands, and with equal readiness, for their delectation, a couple of glasses of the same mixture which set thee on thy feet yesterday and which is to keep them on their feet to-day ?

“Capital stuff, missus,” said one of them, draining his glass to the last drop, and even then trying to make it yield another, “a’most as capital and as worthy of hadmiration as the fair mixer.” And the speaker, an under-sized, though strongly-built man, with light hair, full red beard, and sharp twinkling blue eyes, leered admiringly at the hostess.

The other man, considerably taller than his companion, with darker hair and eyes, and a solemn and serious, not to say heavy expression of countenance, was still engaged in the delightful business of emptying his glass, as his companion spoke ; but he now put it down empty also.

“Took the road to Cloisterham, did he, missus ?” he enquired slowly, fingering something contemplatively in his pocket as he spoke.

“The road to Cloisterham,” chirruped the beaming landlady. “I went out myself

to see. Have another glass, gentlemen? it shall be ready in a minute."

The little man, with a longing look in his blue eyes, glanced enquiringly at the other, who answered *him*, and not the landlady.

"No, William; we've a long pull, and a strong pull, to make to-day, and I'm not a gwine to let you fuddle yourself beforehand, not if I knows it, William."

"You are right, Josiah," answered the other, resignedly.

"Now I'd risk another glass of the stuff," said the man called Josiah, this time speaking to the hostess, "that the man, missus, was a handsome man. I calculate on having some experience of the ladies, and the ladies wouldn't take the trouble to run after *us*, for the puppus of one more look of *our* handsome mugs. Now would they, William?"

"I believe you," said the other.

"He wasn't a handsome man," cried the landlady, eagerly, and blushing a little, "he was an ugly man, a frightful man, an odious man."

As she spoke, William leered at Josiah; and Josiah, fondly patting again that something in his pocket, frowned at William.

"Lor now! Only think! Not handsome!" said the tall man. "But I reckon I know

what missus means. Lor, I'm acquainted with the lovely sex, have studied 'em on all sides, and from all pints of the compass. Though, for the matter of that, 'tis impossible to get to the bottom on 'em arter all. But in the matter of beauty in the masculine gender, the ladies have but one opinion. A man may have the face and figur of an Apoller, but if he ain't got a beard, he's an 'odious man' to them. They dotes upon beards, bless 'em! Ten to one, William, and sure to win, that the gentleman hadn't got no beard."

The landlady laughed as she met the speaker's eyes, and laughed more loudly still, as Josiah pulled at his own black beard, and William ran his fingers through his bushy red one, with unspeakable complacency.

"No, he hadn't got a beard," she said, "not that she cared about one, not a bit."

"Nor whiskers?" put in William, on his own account.

"Nor whiskers."

"Nor moustaches?" inquired William, again.

"Nor moustaches," answered the hostess.

"William," interrupted Josiah, suddenly, in a sombre and rebuking manner, "if you ain't got nothing better to say than them there

remarks, hunder the gravity of the present hoccasion, which remarks, if I titivate them as trivial, William, I titivate as not below their merits, then you'd much better turn your—I won't say insignificant person, William, for I never wounds the feelings of a friend, hunder any circumstances, however haggravated, but will only say—your person, such as it is, back towards London, and stay there, William. That's my advice, William. Take it or leave it."

"You are right, Josiah," answered the other, humbly.

"Very well. Favour *me* with your attention, missus. The cove has took the road to Cloisterham; has got no beard; had on a new suit of dark brown cloth."

"No, grey," said the landlady.

"Of course, mum. Only a slip of the tongue. And his 'at? A chimney-pot, warn't it, missus?"

"A dark felt hat, drawn low over his face."

"To be sure! And what was it o'clock, mum, when the cove took the highroad to Cloisterham?"

"More than two hours ago."

"Only think! Two hours ago! Come along, William. We ain't got no time to lose.

Good morning, missus ; we shall be a coming back for another glass of the stuff, shan't we, William ? But before we goes, just tell us, missus. You've been a wondering what on airth makes us so curious about the cove ; now, havn't you ? ”

Not a bit, with a contemptuous toss of the pretty head. She had other things to think of.

“ Well, missus, there ain't no mystery in it. We're three of the best of friends, we are ; me, the cove, and William there ; and we are a going to make a pedestrian tower together ; and the cove, which 'is name is Anthony Green, if so be as you might like to know it, missus ; though I'll be bound—he was always up to a joke, was Anthony—he gave you another for the fun of it.”

“ He gave me no name at all,” pouted the landlady, “ and I didn't ask him for it. He paid his bill and went away like a gentleman. Anthony, indeed ! ”

“ Well, it ain't a purty name,” remarked Josiah, “ but what can a cove do ? A cove don't give himself his own name, as a rule, and this cove didn't for certain. Now did he, William ? ”

William, who had been regarding Josiah with open-eyed admiration, replied, heading

his remark with something quite different, "That he'd be blest if he did."

"Well, good-day, missus. Two hours on ahead, did you say? Never mind! Me and William is steady on our pins, and we'll ketch him up in next to no time. Lor, how glad I shall be to see him! We are so fond of him, ain't we, William? Won't we hug him, and never let him loose again. Now, William, will you toddle, or will you not? If it hadn't been for you, standing here and chattering as if time warn't of no importance, we should have been a good hour further on the road by this time. You understand now, missus, why we was so curous about the cove."

O yes, she understood! Better far than either William or Josiah fancied, and was gone full trot to tell her old man all about it, ere the two cunning ones were quite lost sight of on the road.

And George, the male factotum, and Eliza, the female one, who had been imbibing the whole of the foregoing conversation at a respectful distance, had their own private opinions about it too; which opinions they began to impart to one another as soon as the missus was out of hearing.

"Look 'ee here, Liz, old girl!" began

George, laying a massive finger by the side of his massive nose, and winking double winks of supernatural intelligence at his listener, "if the first chap hadn't murder writ on his face, and the two hothers handcuffs, then my name ain't George, which my god-fathers and my godmothers did give me, and your name won't never be Mrs. George, which it shall be, if you'll say the word, old girl, and give us a buss to settle it."

Whereupon Eliza, who had been looking out for ten years or more for some such remark from George, and was quite willing to give both word and "buss," did so with tremendous emphasis then and there, and thus to these two, at least, the ill-omened visitors had been messengers of good-will and unity.

All unconscious of what was going on so far behind him, John Jasper, who had wrestled with success against the weakness threatening to overwhelm him, went on again apace. Something within him warned him that he had no time to waste, that he must make the best use of the strength he had, before it deserted him again. Did he feel danger in the balmy air? Did he scent the hounds following him?

On, on, faster than ever. He had some-

thing of the harassed, anxious look of one hunted by this time, and drew his breath in short, quick gasps. But if he was pursued, he was distancing his pursuers every moment. He knew of a hundred short cuts through fields and lanes which they did not. They stopped to dine on the road; he stopped nowhere. He had taken the precaution of providing himself at the inn with cold meat and bread, and a flask of brandy, and partook of these refreshments on the road.

On, on, with the bloodhounds on his track. They were coming on with noses full of the scent of him, and in the right direction now. They were far behind still, but they were fresh and vigorous, and Heaven help him, or his own master the Evil One, or they will hunt him down after all.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when he approached Cloisterham, and saw before him the old square tower of the Cathedral and the red-brick houses, warm and glowing in the sunshine.

He was almost exhausted, but seemed to gather new courage on arriving at his journey's end. He did not enter the city by the direct way, but skirted it rather, going in at last by byways and alleys, which he knew well, and where he met hardly anybody.

He had drawn his felt hat so low over his eyes that only his closely-shaven chin was visible; and one or two whom he met, and whom he knew slightly, as he did almost every one in Cloisterham, passed him by as indifferently as if he had been the stranger he would appear. His object was attained; a casual glance failed to recognise him, and he breathed more freely as he realised that such was the case.

Always creeping and sidling along, he emerged at last into a part where he could see the Cathedral Close and Minor Canon Corner, yet remain himself pretty secure from observation. If any one should chance to pass him, he had only to pretend to walk on quietly, and return, when they were gone, to his post of observation. There he set himself to wait and watch.

Fixing his cruel eyes upon the house inhabited by the Minor Canon, he saw that fresh-faced gentleman, the personified image of a good conscience and a guileless heart, issue therefrom, and turn his steps towards the Cathedral. He saw other clergymen, and his Reverence the Dean himself, come from various directions, and enter that sacred edifice. He saw the choir boys arrive, rosy and noisy, jostling and treading upon one

another's heels, and with difficulty restrained in the free exercise of these boyish ebullitions by the grave choir-master, his successor. He saw Mr. Tope, the verger, and a small congregation enter, too. Finally, he heard the organ swell and rise, and the fresh, clear treble voices of the smaller boys join the deeper ones of the elders in a glorious burst of melody, which seemed as if it floated up to the very gates of heaven.

That is to say, he saw all this with his eyes and heard it with his ears, mechanically, for all his heart and all his thoughts were concentrated on one spot, and lost in one contemplation—the Minor Canon's house, and a little figure there, which he longed to see pass the threshold.

At last—at last—he had been waiting about an hour, but he hardly knew himself whether it had been an eternity or a second—the door opened, and Rosa, dressed for walking, came out alone. He had made up his mind that he might have to wait a day—days perhaps—for this opportunity, and had laid his plans accordingly; but that devil, whom he served so well, had worked miracles for his retainer, and had granted him, before he expected it, the opportunity he desired.

He had not looked upon that lovely face in

the flesh for a month—for thirty long days—and he now let his longing eyes—famished for want of her—take their full, and feast ravenously.

She was pale, he thought, and thinner. The childish plumpness had vanished quite, and the sweet mouth was drawn down slightly at the corners—not peevishly or discontentedly as he had seen it often in the old times, when it had been his blessed privilege to sit beside her, but as if weary and in pain—and as her wonderful eyes, so dark and soft, looked in the direction where he was crouching, he fancied they shone through tears which she kept back with effort.

But how beautiful she was! How much more beautiful than he had imagined her. If the bud had given glorious promise, the wondrous beauty of the opening flower exceeded even expectation. He fancied, looking with gloating eyes upon her loveliness, that he had only faintly dreamed of it before, and that he now, for the first time, really *felt* it—felt it like a sharp knife wounding every fibre of his quivering heart.

She went towards the river; he always following her, climbing up towards the Monastery ruin as he saw that she intended to take the path below, and going on swiftly

and noiselessly until he had attained a point where he could descend without attracting her observation, and, cowering behind a few stunted bushes growing there, arrest her as she passed.

As she came slowly on, nearing him every moment, the passionate beating of his heart almost stifled him, and the blood, rushing wildly to his head, blinded him and blotted her out from his sight.

Was he going to faint again? Was he going to become insensible, and lose her, now that he was almost certain of her? He must compose himself; must turn away his eyes for a moment, for the sight of her beauty intoxicated him.

He swallowed another deep draught of brandy, and looked back along the path which he had taken, and then saw, to his unutterable dismay, that there was some one there.

A tall, lithe young man, coming along as he had done, and looking ever and anon down upon the fairy figure far below. John Jasper knew him—recognised him as he came nearer, with a bitter malediction. No chance passer-by; but one who had followed her, as he had followed, and with the same intent. It was the man who had dared to look love at

her in London, and whose sentence, if a successful rival, was — without ' mercy — Death.

He drew out the revolver which he had brought with him, cocked and levelled it; then awaited in breathless expectation the advent of this new-comer, always keeping him covered with his murderous weapon.

On came Mr. Tartar, quickly and securely, with a light, elastic step, little dreaming that his life hung by a thread; while John Jasper, alternately watching him and the girl below, with murder in his heart, and the means of committing murder in his hand, waited for his coming.

Suddenly the sea-lieutenant began to descend: the murderer crouching there, might have carried into execution his evil purpose many times during this descent, but he hesitated still, knowing that he had him always in his power, and fearing that the noise of the discharge might be heard, and baffle his own plans.

He waited, therefore, to note the result of the interview; and thus became a witness to what passed below between the two—ah! so unconscious of this deadly neighbour!

He was too far up, and too far in advance, to hear all they said, but he understood its

import. If the sea-lieutenant had kissed the sweet lips of the girl, his mad jealousy might have gained the victory over his prudence, and he might have shot him dead where he stood; but at the close of the interview, he only touched her hand with his lips as they parted, and left her behind alone.

Rapture indescribable! Bliss unutterable!
Alone and in his power!

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. TARTAR LEARNS HOW TO CRY.

MR. TARTAR had gone away from Rosa in an uneasy and ever-increasing solicitude concerning her, which seemed, for the moment, to even overbalance his deep sorrow and disappointment ; a sorrow, which one who had so truly loved could not fail to feel, on receiving a refusal so absolute and entire ; and this feeling retained its hold upon him with a pertinacity which the occasion hardly appeared to warrant.

He had barely left her, in obedience to her repeated request that he would do so, before he blamed himself severely for having yielded to it ; and would have retraced his steps, had he not feared to cause her pain and annoyance—for she had said that they must never meet again.

As he remembered this hard decree—which he did not dream of disputing, for to his brave and chivalrous spirit, every word which fell from those adored lips was a command as binding as any command of a superior officer, and admitting of no repeal—something rising in his throat almost choked him, and it re-

quired the strongest effort of his manhood to check the rising sob.

But before yielding to this emotion—before allowing himself the luxury of giving way to his grief, he must devise some plan to get her safely home (for the more he thought about it the more uneasy he became), and he determined to ascertain that she had arrived at Minor Canon Corner before going away. He would linger about in the neighbourhood of the river, and when he knew her in safety, would disappear. She need never know that he had waited.

Having come to this conclusion, he grew more easy concerning her, and the fears and anxieties which had assumed such gigantic proportions a moment ago, seemed to him, now that they were allayed, foolish and exaggerated.

She was accustomed to walk alone. The country was not like London, and she was close to the town. Every object was brilliantly illuminated by the moonlight, and besides, who would think of harming her?

Walking to and fro, every moment fancying he saw the graceful little figure, and every moment disappointed; he began to consider his own position, and to reflect upon what he had lost.

He had never been in love before. An only child, he had never loved any woman but his mother—his dead mother. With a rush of sorrow and remorse, he felt anew (for how often he forgot it) that first loss more bitterly than ever.

Love—with the one exception of the maternal love—is always more or less selfish, and now that he wanted her, he realised for the first time to the full, what he had lost in losing her. On her bosom, encircled by her loving arms, he might have bewailed his hopeless love, without fear and without reproach—might have given free vent to the tears, which he must repress now, and lightened his heart, breaking under its burden. The newness of the pain he was suffering made it more acute. “Oh, mother, mother!”

He had not known that he was weeping till he felt the hot drops upon his hand. He had even forgotten why he was waiting there during that brief agony.

When he looked up again to the bright stars and remembered where he was and what was his object, a minute—ten minutes, might have passed. Borne down and washed over by a heavy wave of sorrow, he had lost sight and hearing for a space.

With violently beating heart, and in a perfect ecstasy of terror, for which he could give no reason, even to himself, he ran towards the river and along its bank until he could see the spot where he had left Rosa, but she was not there.

Fool that he was! she must have passed him in that moment of his weakness, and was no doubt long since safe in Minor Canon Corner; he felt sure she must be there, as he hurried in that direction, running in his eagerness.

On arriving, out of breath and panting, at the door, he met the master of the house, coming out with beaming, though somewhat agitated, countenance, and who regarded him with kind, inquiring eyes. It was evident that the Revd. Sept had some inkling of the mission in which his friend had been engaged.

“In such a tremendous hurry, Tartar?” he said. “You are the bearer of good news, I hope.”

“Has Miss Bud come home?” inquired the sea-lieutenant, breathlessly.

“Yes,” answered the Minor Canon, somewhat surprised at the question and at the agitation in which it was propounded, but in perfect good faith, “she passed me only a

moment ago in the hall. I thought you had come together."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" cried the sea-lieutenant.

It had only been that guilty Mary, a little creature, about the size and figure of Rosa, whom her master, of course, supposed to be busy at her work, but who, by the connivance of cook, a fellow-conspirator, had donned a hat and shawl of the "young lady's," the better to escape observation, and whose plump cheeks were still reddened from the kisses imprinted there by that reprobate, Bill Bumpkins in the Close.

Thus even innocent Mr. Chrisparkle became an instrument in the furtherance of that catastrophe, then in its first act, upon the bank of the lonely river.

"I wondered," continued the Minor Canon, "at her passing me so abruptly, with averted face, and not even returning my greeting, but I understand it now, I am afraid. Poor Tartar! Poor friend!"

"I have risked all I had upon one stake," said the sea-lieutenant, almost broken-hearted, "and have lost, Chrisparkle, that's all."

He tried to smile, as he met his friend's look of heartfelt sympathy, but the smile was

a miserable failure, and more touching than a groan. He broke down again, and for the first time since his earliest childhood, suffering conquered pride, and he lifted up his voice, and wept.

“Let the tears flow, my lad,” said the elder man, taking his friend’s arm and leading him gently from the house into the undisturbed quiet and heavenly peace which reigned in the Cathedral Close. “I know what it is, Tartar, old boy! We all come to it, sooner or later; every true man among us: and an honest love, even though unreturned, is never a thing to be ashamed of.”

But like a wise man, and a judicious man, he said no more until the sea-lieutenant had regained, in some measure, his self-composure. Such victories over one’s self can only be won alone, and aided, but by God.

“I was going to meet the omnibus, when I saw you,” said the Minor Canon, after a long pause, during which the two men had walked on together side by side, each occupied with his own thoughts. “I have received a most mysterious letter from Mr. Grewgious, informing me that he is coming down to Cloisterham this evening, accompanied by Neville and Hel—Miss Landless, and begging me to meet them at the omnibus,

as he has some startling communication to make to me. Ma is busy in making preparations for the arrival of our guests; she will find room for Miss Landless, who will like to be with her friend, but the gentlemen will have to lodge at the Crozier, for our little nest in Minor Canon Corner is not large enough to hold them."

"They can have my room," said Mr. Tartar. "You see, I must lodge at the Crozier to-night, and go up to London early in the morning. It will be a good excuse, Chrisparkle."

"I suppose you are right, Tartar," answered his friend, "and that I should do the same in your position, though I'm sorry to part with you so, old fellow! But as to the others coming to us, I'm afraid that ma—it's a prejudice which she will overcome soon, I am sure, she is too truly kind and generous to harbour it long—but I sadly fear that she would hardly consent at present, to receive my poor Neville."

"Then we must all get beds at the Crozier," said Mr. Tartar, attempting a laugh (it was the most doleful break-down of a laugh ever heard). "I suppose there's room there?"

"Yes, there's room," answered Mr. Chrisparkle, mechanically. He was thinking of something very different from the Crozier.

“Or, I can set off to walk to London to-night. I almost think that would be best. It would give me something to do, you see, Chrisparkle. I know I shall never learn to forget, but I may learn to bear. I used to think that I could bear pain, and was proud to be able to boast, when quite a little chap, that nobody could make me cry. I’ve been thrashed and tortured many a time, Chrisparkle, when I fagged for other masters not so kind as you—you never licked me, I remember, although I daresay I deserved it often; and I don’t believe you ever had the heart to lick a fellow—but not one of my tormentors could say that they ever got a tear from Harry Tartar. They used to tell me, after thrashing me to within an inch of my life, that I had the stuff of a man in me, and was a confounded plucky little trump; and that made me so proud, that the pleasure almost compensated for the pain of the beating. But this sort of pain is a thousand times worse; it—it makes a baby of a man, Chrisparkle. I—I struggle against it, but it overcomes me. I never dreamed that anything could be so hard to bear.” His voice grew husky, and he ended with a gasp, almost a sob again.

The Minor Canon laid his arm affectionately round the shoulder of the young man, but

only through this loving action gave expression to his sympathy. He knew how cruel was the conflict in which his friend was engaged, and how barren and unfruitful words of comfort are at such a moment. Only love and time can bind up, and heal, such wounds as these.

“I have a great mind to give up my estate to the next heir,” continued the sea-lieutenant, mournfully, “he is sure to get it now at my death, for I shall never marry—and go to sea again, Chrisparkle. At sea, in the midst of ever engrossing work and constant danger, more or less, one has no time for vain regrets, but must keep a cool head and a steady eye for the work, on the accurate carrying out of which hang many lives, of more worth than one’s own. I think I will go back to my duty.”

In this manner, Mr. Tartar opened his sore heart to his friend, finding, notwithstanding his honest assertion to the contrary, real relief in so doing. For Nature is merciful to her children, merciful even when she chastens them most severely. No intolerable anguish, either bodily or mental, lasts long. Relief comes surely, either the relief of the first step towards healing and convalescence, or the relief of torpor, stupefaction and death.

In due time—a little delayed perhaps by Mr. Tartar's confidences—they arrived at the spot where the omnibus was expected, and found they had still some minutes to spare. In a very short time, however, before they had time or reasonable cause to grow impatient, the crack of Joe's whip was heard, and at full trot, with a rush and a rattle, up dashed the horses to the spot where they were waiting.

The three expected were there, inside. Mr. Chrisparkle saw them first. Had the recital of his friend's sufferings affected the good man so much, and was it only sympathy for him which made the Minor Canon's face flush so hotly, his strong hand tremble, his eye soften with emotion? Alas, poor Mr. Tartar, mournful and subdued in the background, feeling himself sadly in the way, and yet hardly knowing how to beat a retreat, was as completely forgotten, as he was completely lost sight of, for the time! For the Minor Canon was raising his hat, and looking with all his eyes and all his heart at a young lady's face, framed in by the old coach window; while the proud and haughty beauty blushing returned his salute; her brilliant eyes drooping, and her face softening into sweet humility as she did so.

Oh woman, ever restlessly striving to attain dominion, and to grasp the rough reins of government with thy slender fingers! is not such homage enough? However proudly man proclaims himself thy master, at one period in his life, he does thee humblest reverence as his sovereign; lays himself down under thy triumphal car; and worships even the ground, which thou treadeth with disdainful feet.

After the usual greetings, Mr. Chrisparkle offered his arm to Helena, who, blushing and timid, radiant and bewildered, appeared so strangely transformed to her pale brother, that he looked at her in wonder, and, almost in alarm. As for the Minor Canon, he, with unwonted inconsiderateness, was so engrossed in contemplating, with a sort of rapturous awe, the blushing face beside him, as to barely notice how sharp and pale was his pupil's, and how worn and wasted the young man looked. Long continued mental anxiety and suffering had been doing their fatal work too surely, and Mr. Grewgious' kind heart bled as he observed what ravages they had been committing on the poor lad's frame.

"Take my arm, Mr. Neville," he said, noticing and perhaps dimly comprehending Mr. Chrisparkle's unaccountable absence of

mind, “and lean your whole weight upon it. You don’t look over-strong, and I’m as strong as a horse. I’m an angular man, and my arm naturally partakes of this quality, but I’m able and willing. Don’t mind my prancing a little. I compared myself to a horse just now—for which I owe an apology to that noble animal—and to-day I’m on my mettle. I have had an extra feed of corn, you see. To let the cat half out of the bag, the reason why I was so urgent about your accompanying me to-day—and you didn’t want to, at first, you know—is a secret, with which I am so highly charged, that it affects me like electricity, and seems to be oozing out of my elbows. When I was a lad, I took private lessons in dancing—I was ashamed to take ’em in public, being so eminently unfitted by Nature to excel, or even to play second fiddle, in that graceful accomplishment—but bless you! no private lessons could instil it into me. My toes would turn in, and interfere with my heels, which would stick out; my elbows elbowed everything in the room to such extent, that the breakages almost ruined me. I gave it up at last, not only on account of its being beyond the power of mortal to make me learn it, but because my master, a most elegant little fellow, fell ill at the end

of a fortnight and declared upon his honour, that the fever had been occasioned by the agony of soul which he had endured on witnessing my contortions. I paid the doctor, of course, and allowed my legs and feet to act as Nature meant 'em for the future ; but this evening I feel so uncommonly frisky that I could dance a waltz almost. There I go again. Dear me ! I hope I havn't alarmed you."

His antics and his oddity, and above all the honest kindness which lighted up his unfinished face, and gave a touching charm even to his uncouthness, affected Neville strangely. His face worked, and the laugh he would have uttered, died unborn.

"Oh, you poor, poor, ill-used laddie!" continued the Collector of Rents, "I'm fit to burst when I think of it. I shall do something desperate before we get to Minor Canon Corner. I ain't fit for society under these circumstances. What the—I was going to use a bad word, for which I beg your pardon—what on earth does Mr. Chrisparkle mean by running away with that handsome sister of yours, and leaving us so unceremoniously in the lurch ?"

This time Neville really laughed ; such a poor, thin, puny laugh ! It had not strength to stand upon its legs, but fell faint, and died

by reason of its weakness. But he felt so unusually bright and well this evening—unusually so for him, poor fellow!—and so calm and contented. Cloisterham looked so beautiful and full of peace. He had first seen it in the moonlight, and now once more the moon's mild beams shed their calm, sweet light on all around. He no longer felt himself an outcast; it seemed to him—why, he did not know—as if he need be no longer shunned and avoided by his race. He had been so afraid to come back, and only persuaded to do so by the united persuasions of his sister and Mr. Grewgious, but now all fear was gone. He no longer dreaded to meet old acquaintances, or would have gone out of his way to avoid them. He had sinned much, been harsh and unforgiving many times, wayward and passionate. He had had murder in his heart, and fierce anger, and he had been punished for it justly; but of the crime laid to his charge he was innocent, and God knew it, and his fellow men would know it, in God's time. He could kiss the chastening rod, and submit meekly to his chastisement, for he was forgiven—he knew he was forgiven. How sweet was the fresh air, after the dust and smoke of London! how glad he was to breathe it once more before—

He did not finish the sentence, even to himself, for he saw Mr. Grewgious looking at him with eyes which were glistening, yet not with mirth, and he had to smile back, and reassure him. But the Collector of Rents had screwed up his eyes so tightly that no betraying drop could fall.

Turning back in this highly screwed-up condition—perhaps to let the drop, which was difficult to hold longer, escape unobserved—he saw something coming on behind ; and after getting rid of the obstruction to his vision, discovered, to his amazement, that it was his eminently useful friend of Staple Inn, the comely sea-lieutenant.

“Bless my soul !” he exclaimed. “Look, Mr. Neville, if my eyes do not deceive me, which they have a trick of doing, there’s Mr. Tartar coming on like a mute at a funeral. How do you do, sir ? I am delighted to see you. I shall also be delighted to impart to you a secret with which I am overloaded, in confidence, when we are alone. How is the charming old lady ?”

It was Mr. Tartar, who, finding himself recognised, looked as if he would like to turn tail, and run away ; but overcoming this impulse, enormously inappropriate for one who had served under the banner of her *Britannic*

Majesty—God bless her !—he came forward to pay his respects, hat in hand. But the melancholy, plainly written on his face, deepened into a look of profoundest misery, and he winced before Mr. Grewgious's question, as he never would have winced under the lash. He had been listlessly following the others with a sad, sad heart; half-glad, and yet half-wounded, that he was forgotten. He had hoped to get one more glimpse of Rosa before he went away for ever—to get one last look of the sweet face (she could not grudge it him, for she would never know it) which henceforth he would see only in his dreams.

Mr. Grewgious looked quite frightened as he saw this sad face, for his instinct told him that he had wounded the young man. He did not look like a successful lover, Heaven help him !

“I—I beg your pardon,” he exclaimed. “I am afraid I have been putting my foot into it. My foot has this unpleasant peculiarity, that it is always getting into it, without consulting me, its master, beforehand. Please to consider my remarks as unsaid. I will refrain from making any in future, being by Nature so eminently unfitted so to do.”

They went on together, Mr. Tartar in-

sisting on Neville taking his arm on the other side, and in this manner managing to keep a tolerably straight line towards the Minor Canon's house, for the gyrations of the perturbed Mr. Grewgious were astounding. Mr. Chrisparkle and Helena were far ahead, exchanging a word or two now and then, but satisfied, for the present, in being so near together, arm in arm—the throbbings of his heart awakening echoes in hers. But the girl's face grew grave as they approached Minor Canon Corner, for the old jealous fears—so bravely contended against, yet not quite conquered—came back again, and for the first time in his life, the Revd. Septimus wished that dear home were further.

They all went into the house, bright and warm to welcome them, with its cheery little hostess, a beaming image of hospitality, awaiting them in the hall—all except, of course, poor, forlorn Mr. Tartar, who crept away, as the door closed upon him, with an aching heart. Nobody cared for him! His friend had forgotten him quite, and they were all indifferent to his sufferings! He peered into the lighted rooms, but saw no Rosa. Even this last comfort was denied him. Had it been a sin to love her, that he was punished for it so remorselessly? He had just turned

to go back to the Inn, almost wishing he could lie down and die by the way, when the door burst open again, and the Minor Canon came out, pale and horror-struck.

“Is that you, Tartar?” he cried. “Come with me, quick. It was a fatal mistake of mine. Rosa has not come back at all. She is alone, Tartar—at this time of night—alone by the river.”

And without another word, the two men set off, running full speed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SECOND SUITOR BY THE RIVER.

ROSA had flung herself down on a little rustic seat under the hill-side, on Mr. Tartar's departure, and given full vent again to her feelings in a renewed burst of grief. Her pocket-handkerchief was dripping wet when she stopped exhausted, and the fountain whence flowed her tears had run dry, and would yield no more for the present. She had tried so hard to prevent this acknowledgment of love on the part of the sea-lieutenant, which her duty—or her duty as she believed it—forbade her to return. What she might have done under other circumstances? Whether she might have learned to love him? Whether she did love him in her inmost heart?—all these were questions which she dared neither review nor contemplate, and she put them away from her with strong effort and determination. He was so handsome and so manly; so worthy of love, and of a woman's deep and undivided affection; so generous and so noble; so gentle and so strong (these two last qualities alone are almost irresistible in the eyes of a woman)

that she avoided, with a sort of fear, all thought of him, and did her utmost to forget him altogether, as far as possible. It was this feeling of doubt in herself, more than doubt in him, which had prompted her to say that they must never meet again : although, as she reflected now with shame and distress, she had no right whatever to dictate to him, and that having declined to accept his love, she had been guilty of great presumption in so doing, and had virtually banished him from the home which was hers for the present, and which was also the home of his friend.

With a sigh and a tear for her own indiscretion, she began to reflect mournfully upon what a fatal gift beauty was after all, and how much suffering it entailed—suffering for its unfortunate possessor, and suffering for those attracted by it.

Whatever faults poor Rosa had, and no doubt their number was legion, at all events she was honest and true, and her bright eyes could not but see, for they were keen and sharp as well as bright, that she possessed beauty in a very high degree.

She had been undisputedly the most beautiful at Miss Twinkleton's, and even the advent of that brilliant star, Miss Landless, could not shake the allegiance of the pupils in the

Nuns' House to their chosen queen. It had occasioned a perfect panic among the young ladies when Miss Giggles—about as unæsthetic a young person as ever lived—had declared openly in the “apartment allotted to study,” that, for her part, she considered Helena to the full as handsome as Rosa, and that she did not admire little women. Then and there had Miss Giggles been transported to Coventry, and accompanied thither by every mark of opprobrium and ignominy; Miss Ferdinand in particular—a most ardent admirer of little Rosa’s—strictly keeping her vow of not speaking to her for a whole week. Not that Rosa herself had ever felt the least bit jealous of her friend, but was always her most sincere advocate, and admired her with her whole heart.

But how many a time she had felt proud and glad to be so pretty; how many a time, she had smiled back well content at her own lovely image in the glass; how many a time, she had triumphed in the reflection that every eye falling upon her must be pleased and satisfied; and how often she had pitied other girls less favoured than she; had shown Miss Jones little attentions and kindnesses, because, poor girl! she had red hair and freckled skin, and had even sought out Miss

Giggles in Coventry, with her snub nose and wide mouth, and petted and consoled her there.

And poor innocent Rosa, with her tender conscience and her loving heart, fancied, even as she had done before at Brighton, as she sat weeping all alone by the river in the moonlight, that she had been to blame somehow for her beauty ; that she had petted and rejoiced in it, as if it were a virtue ; that she had tried to enhance it with fine clothes and bright ribbons, and other foolish vanities, and, with bowed head and heart, believed God was punishing her for this. Oh, how she envied others who had been spared this temptation ; how gladly she would have resigned it ; how despicable it appeared to her now in comparison with a noble heart and virtuous life !

She raised her hot face to the peaceful sky, and let the cool breeze of the evening fan it, as she clasped her hands and prayed fervently to her Father in Heaven, that He would punish and forgive her (but not let others suffer for her sins), and show her, in His love and mercy, what she ought to do—that He would teach her what was right, and give her strength to do it.

That appeal to God calmed and comforted.

her more than anything else could have done, and she began to think it was time she went home, or she would cause kind Mrs. Chrisparkle needless anxiety on her account. She would just take one more turn by the river to cool her flushed cheeks and dry her wet eyes, and then she would hasten back to Minor Canon Corner.

How peaceful and soothing was the aspect of the landscape; how brilliant was the moonshine; how calm the face of Nature!

She got up, and began to walk along the bank of the river as she had done before. The elasticity of her youth, and naturally buoyant nature, could not fail to assert itself, and rose, ultimately, superior to the depression which had almost mastered it. God would show her some way of escape out of this labyrinth; she was sure He would. She had put her case in His hands, and could patiently await His verdict.

Oh, dear! how far she had wandered, and how thoughtless she had been! She must run for it now, or Mrs. Chrisparkle would never let her go out to walk alone any more. She pushed back the clustering hair from her hot forehead, drew her hat further over her eyes, and began to hasten homewards.

What was that rustling in the bushes be-

hind her? A snake perhaps—a bird—a rabbit? No, a man! A solitary pedestrian coming on rapidly. She wondered that she had not heard or seen him before, but she had been lost in her reflections. Still unalarmed, she drew aside to let him pass, for he was gaining on her swiftly.

But he did not pass, as she expected. He stood still as he came up beside her, regarding her silently, with dark eyes gleaming fire.

“What was the meaning of this? Why did the man look at her in that strange and awful manner?” she asked herself with beating heart. For an instant her terrified gaze met his with wonder and amaze; then she recognised him, with a wild shriek of terror.

But before her cry for help could ring out into the clear night air, he had smothered it with his hand upon her mouth, which he held there, until he felt that she was silent.

“Don’t scream, don’t be frightened, my beauty! It is I!” he said, “I, who love you, who adore you. No, don’t scream, beloved, or I must stop your mouth again; not with my rough hand—pardon me if I have hurt you—but with something softer, sweet one!—with a kiss.”

In an agony of horror and alarm, which whitened her face even to the trembling

lips, she nevertheless struggled successfully against the feeling of deadly faintness which threatened to lay her prostrate at his feet, and looked despairingly backwards and forwards along the path upon which they were standing, up the hill-side and over the misty river, but saw no one who could help her. Strange to say—or, rather, not strange, for it is a proved fact that the intrepidity of many a woman grows with the magnitude of the demand upon it, in a manner unexpected and unlooked for—this helplessness—this being cast entirely upon her own resources, did not rob her of her courage, but gave it back to her tenfold.

With high spirit—always dwelling latent in her, but which, as yet, had been uncalled for and unneeded in her sheltered and protected life—and with ready appreciation of the danger which would increase if she lost her own presence of mind, and gave way to her natural alarm before this madman, she faced him no longer tremblingly, but dauntlessly; and, like Una with the savage lion, shielded by her own spotless innocence and purity, dared him to approach her, or to touch her again with his polluted hand.

He was contemplating her with a gloating rapture—which sickened her once more—and was murmuring—

“A kiss, beloved! Only one kiss! No more till we have spoken. I have kissed you a million times in my dreams, but what is a dream to the reality? Give me one—give me one, for I am hungering and famishing for want of it, and must die if you refuse me.”

“Never!” she exclaimed, with a gesture of unspeakable loathing and abhorrence, drawing back as he approached her, and she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, but always keeping her steady eyes upon him. How can you be so base, and mean, and cowardly, as thus to pursue a helpless girl? Is that the way to win love or respect? Pass on, and cease to persecute me; you have had your answer, what further do you want of me?”

“You yourself, my darling! Nothing more; but, by all the devils in hell, I swear to you, nothing less. Give me one kiss, my angel! that I may live and be a man again. I saw your other lover go away just now. You were less scrupulous and prudish with him. You kissed him, beloved.”

“It is a wicked lie,” she cried indignantly, “I did not.”

“No, you did not,” he answered, with a curling lip, “well for him that you did not! He would never have gone back alive to Cloisterham if you had. I could never have

looked on and borne that, with his life in my hand. I had covered him with my weapon, and should have killed him, had he dared to touch your lips."

Even in the midst of this terrible scene, so awful that it seemed to Rosa as if it could not be real, but must be a fearful nightmare from which she would soon awake, her heart bounded with joy as she heard this, and knew that he was out of danger now. Even in the midst of this mortal agony, she uttered a prayer of fervent thanks and heartfelt gratitude to God, who had enabled her to resist that temptation, to do what she had believed to be right, and so to have been the unconscious instrument in saving him.

"Listen," she said, raising her small hand, and drawing her little figure up to its full height; the pallor of her face, and the solemn look in her dark eyes, making her appear almost like a spirit in the moonlight. "Let us be patient with one another! Let us speak like reasonable beings over our hard fate! A strange and unaccountable destiny has ordained that you should love me (she brought out the word *love* with a shudder which she could not repress), and the same destiny has ordained that I—that I should not be able to return the feeling. This is how the case stands. Is it not so?"

“Go on,” he murmured, regarding her with fierce delight, “go on, most beautiful of women ! peerless among your sex ! and I will listen. If you bid me, I will wait for my reward. I have waited—years—centuries, as it seems to me, and I can wait a few minutes longer. There are no commands, save one, issuing from those lovely lips that I would not obey.”

“I am willing,” she continued, faintly, for her courage was giving way under the strain upon it, and ebbing fast, as she noticed how little effect her words were producing, “to meet you half way, and to bear my share of the suffering to which we are condemned. I promise you, if you will abandon your pursuit of me—which makes me wretched, and which can be productive of no other result to you—by my most sacred word and honour, to remain single all my life, to accept no man as a suitor or a husband, and, in this way, to give you no reason for hatred or jealousy of another ; only begging you to leave me undisturbed to my solitary life and lonely fate, to which your love will have consigned me.”

There was no quaver in her voice, nor tear in her eye, as she concluded this proposal ; no shrinking back from this unheard-of sacrifice, this laying down of her young life

upon the altar of his remorseless love, worse than any hate ; and she looked at him gravely and steadily, awaiting his reply.

What she said, seemed to have made some impression on him. When he spoke again, his voice had lost its wildness, and was subdued into a tone of quieter persuasion.

“Ask me anything but that,” he said, “and I will grant it ; make any other request, wish for anything else, and if it be within the range of human possibility to obtain it, it shall be yours ; but this is impossible. I cannot give you up, even if I would. The ties which bind me to you are too strong for any power to rend. Now listen to my proposal. Stay ! you *must* hear it ! I will be your humblest vassal in all else, but now I must compel you. I have been a moody, envious, wicked man, beloved—all for you. I will be cheerful, happy, contented, if you will take me—all for you again. I have let talent, genius, ambition rust away in that accursed nest yonder, only to be near you, Rosa ; I will now use the abilities which have been given me, make a great name ; attain honour and riches—only to lay them at your worshipped feet. In the great, free country over the water, where every man is valued according to what is in him, and

not for what he happens to have been born, or for what he has amassed, there we will go together. Everything is ready. I will become a king among men, only to make you my queen, and bow down and worship you. Speak, Rosa, and say you will go with me of your own free will, or—”

“Or what?” she asked. She felt her senses were deserting her, and looked round wildly and despairingly.

“Or I must use violence, and take you with me by force. It is your last chance; speak, Rosa!” And he flung himself upon his knees before her, pressing his lips upon her feet.

She made one more effort as she staggered back.

“Do not touch me. I—I know your secret. I have kept it. I *will* keep it, and pray for your forgiveness. How can I clasp the hand of a murderer? Oh, God, do not desert me!”

He sprang to his feet, and laughed aloud.

“All the more reason never to let you go, my beauty! All the more reason for keeping you safe and sure.”

But as he stretched out his arms to encircle her in his embrace, they both heard through the still night, footsteps, as of men

running, and the next moment the echoes gave back and repeated Rosa's piercing shriek for help.

He alone heard the answer. "We are coming, Rosa; we are coming;" for night encompassed the girl's senses, and she sank down unconscious.

Like those of a wild beast brought to bay, the fierce eyes of the desperate man glared in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, for he was uncertain what course to pursue under this unexpected emergency. He listened intently; if only one man were coming to the rescue he might shoot him down and take her with him still; but the words which had been uttered by Mr. Chrisparkle—he had recognised the voice—had been: "*We are coming.*"

There were two, or perhaps more, pursuers then, unless the words had been used as a feint to terrify him, and induce him to abandon her. He would have wrestled with Mr. Chrisparkle, or any two men even, in his present state of passion and strong nervous excitement; but numbers must overpower him in the end, and tear away his precious prize, now that he possessed it.

The girl was quiet and lifeless, and could be carried like a baby; the deep swoon which

had overpowered her, would prevent any further struggle or resistance on her part, and he might even yet, favoured by the night, fly with her and hide her. It was worth trying, at any rate, and fortune favoured the determined.

All these thoughts passed through his mind like a flash of lightning, as he stooped and raised the lifeless form of the girl, pressing it—even in that dread moment, when the exercise of his keenest faculties and highest bodily strength were imperative for his safety, and the carrying out of his designs—with wild passion to his heart.

For the first time he held her in his arms and encircled her in his embrace. The close contact with her person seemed to fill his veins with living fire, and to give him strength to combat with twenty for her possession, and to conquer one and all.

Swiftly and noiselessly he fled along the path by the river, leaving Mr. Chrisparkle, one of the swiftest runners in Cloisterham, who had caught sight of the two, and was calling out to him to stop and surrender himself for God's sake, far behind again.

But his strength deserted him as suddenly and unexpectedly as it had done the day before; his knees shook and trembled under

him ; leaden weights seemed to hang upon his feet and ankles ; he gasped for breath, but found none ; stumbled and fell with his burden.

He was on his feet again in a moment, and staggering on once more ; but he felt and knew that all was over. In another minute or two, the Minor Canon, coming on like the wind, would gain upon him, and all power of grappling with him was lost and gone.

With a wild curse for the master whom he had served so long, and who had deserted him at this crisis, he imagined himself run down ; the girl torn from him, to be happy with another, and to detest his memory and mock his hopeless love ; he himself delivered over to justice, to be punished with the full rigour of the laws of God and man, against which he had sinned so fatally.

Never ! Never ! If she could not be his in life, she should be his in death. He would not be able to lie quiet in the grave, knowing her in the arms of a rival.

With sudden impulse, he sprang up the bank of the river, and standing upon its brink, looked back towards his pursuers, and then down upon the lovely face resting on his shoulder.

He had never seen it so beautiful, he

fancied. No, not even when flushed with health and happiness. Her bright luxuriant hair hung dishevelled over his arm and framed in a face, pale as death, and chaste and pure as marble.

Tenderly, almost reverently, he stroked back the soft, clinging curls, and let his eyes feast for the last time in contemplation of her beauty—beauty which had brought them both to this—to this.

Then he bowed his head, and pressed convulsively his burning, passionate lips on her pure cold ones ; raised her high in the air in full sight of his pursuers, who stood still, paralysed with terror ; clasped her to his heart again ; and with a wild cry of defiance and exultation, sprang with her into the river.

High up splashed countless drops as they fell together. Wide and broad circled the eddies. Then all was quiet and peaceful once more. With calm and untroubled smile the bright moon looked down upon the spot where the crime had been committed, and undisturbed over the placid river, flowing smoothly towards the ocean, lay the autumn mist.

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The Minor Canon had quickly recovered

his presence of mind, lost for one moment in the contemplation of this terrible scene, and, throwing off his coat, dashed up the bank, and ran along it, in hopes of seeing the bodies rise, and being in time to arrest them on their fatal course ; but he was too late.

They rose, indeed, but further down, beyond him, and notwithstanding his utmost efforts, he felt that it would be impossible for him to reach the spot, where they might be expected to rise again, in time to save them. With a fervour with which he had hardly ever prayed—good and religious man though he was—he implored the All-powerful to interpose, for human aid was vain.

As if a miracle had been worked in answer to his passionate supplication, his sharp eyes, sharpened with anxiety, saw another man further down on the bank, looking eagerly, as it appeared, into the river. And a moment later, as the bodies rose again, he heard the splash with which the stranger cleft the water.

He saw him (still running as fast as his legs would carry him) seize the girl's long hair and twine it round his hand. But the tide was running out, and the weight of the two bodies, so closely interlocked that there was no separating them, proved too great for

the strength of their deliverer; he struggled bravely, but unsuccessfully, to swim with them to the shore, and cried out for help.

“Hold them till I come, for the love of God,” cried back Mr. Chrisparkle, springing into the water, and striking out, like the famous swimmer that he was.

He was only just in time, for, with the girl’s hair still entwined in his hand, the heroic rescuer had been forced to succumb to the remorseless element; and it was three lifeless bodies which the Minor Canon, with the utmost exertion, and assisted by Mr. Tartar, brought to shore at last.

“She is dead!” cried the sea-lieutenant, in heartrending tones, throwing himself down by the unconscious form of the girl he loved so dearly;” and I am the cause, Chrisparkle. I have killed her. I wish to God that I were dead, too.”

And he broke out into a perfect storm of sobs and lamentations, utterly regardless of the other two motionless figures.

The Minor Canon, dripping wet, and shaking with cold, had not one thought for himself, under these distressing circumstances; he had been quietly disengaging the poor girl from the murderer’s terrible embrace, and was now searching John Jasper’s pockets to

see if he could find something to restore her. To his unutterable joy, his search was successful. He found the flask, still containing some few drops of brandy.

“Be a man, Tartar, and help me to save these poor creatures,” he said, almost sternly, as he endeavoured to pour a drop of the spirit between Rosa’s clenched teeth. “Look at the young man, lying there, who has so nobly risked his life, and perhaps lost it, in endeavouring to save the lives of the others. We may be successful in bringing them all back to life, please God! if we do our utmost. Fetch me my coat from the bank yonder, and I will wrap it round this poor child, and you can wrap yours round that brave fellow there.”

Mr. Tartar was off like a shot to execute these commissions, and having done so, waited for further instructions from his friend.

“Now take the poor lad in your arms, Tartar,” said the Minor Canon, lifting Rosa himself as he spoke. “We must carry them home, and send help as speedily as possible for the other. I do not like to abandon the miserable wretch, but there is no help for it, and he is certainly the last to be considered.”

“ God bless and reward you as you deserve, Chrisparkle, my noble, high-minded friend ! ” cried Mr. Tartar, greatly moved, as he obeyed again.

“ To them sentiments, which does the cove as utters of ’em honour,” said a voice below, so suddenly and unexpectedly, that the two friends started as if it had been a spirit’s, “ I says ‘ so be it,’ and ‘ amen,’ and so would William here, only he’s dazed and bewildered like for the moment, and a born fool always.” And the speaker, scrambling up the steep bank, clapped the Minor Canon approvingly and encouragingly on the back.

“ You are a out and outer, ole chap,” he said, “ a downright plucky one, you air, and it ain’t many as I’d a say that to, as William knows. Now is it, William ? ”

“ I believe you, Josiah,” answered his companion, but he spoke in an agitated manner, and looked scared and trembling.

“ As for the cove lying there,” continued Josiah, “ so still and white, you’ve no call to trouble yourselves about him, gentlemen. He’ll be well looked after, he will. William and me is come a puppus to take care o’ him, and we’re a gwine to do it, ain’t us, William ? ”

“ I believe you,” said the little man again, adding under his breath, “ O, ain’t it horrible ! ”

Three on 'em. Lor a mussy on us ! three on 'em, Josiah."

" I don't mind telling you, gentlemen," said the tall man, looking down on his companion with undisguised contempt, " that William, drivelling there, is noo to the purfession, and ain't likely to make his fortun in it. Come round, did you ask, gentlemen ? To be sure ! The pretty creetur—for she is a pretty creetur, though I ain't partial to fay-males, myself, as a rule ; they're the very devil to handcuff—will be a dancin' and a singin' to-morrow like a lark, if she don't take cold—and it is confounded cold—from the water ; and the young chap, he's a hopen-ing his hies a 'ready. He's only in a faint, he is. There now, what do you say to that William ? Them coves have acut off, and left me a talking to the hair, or to you, which is much of a muchness. That's what I call p'liteness in coves as purtends to be gentle-folk, cuss 'em !"

" Now, William, will you look alive and pull off your coat to wrap it round the cove, or will you not ? He looks ugly, don't he ? looks like summut as we shall all come to sooner or later—like death, William."

" O, he looks horrible, Josiah ! He's as dead as a stone, ain't he ? Blest, if this ain't beastly work ; it makes my flesh creep."

“They says, as folks born to be hanged can’t never be drowned,” said Josiah thoughtfully, looking down upon the ghastly image lying on the wet grass, “but there ain’t no rule without exceptions, William, and I’m blowed if I don’t believe this is one of the exceptions.” He stooped as he spoke, and laid his hand upon the heart of the prostrate man. It had been beating wildly and passionately only a few moments before, but now no sign of life was to be felt.

“Take him up, William, wrap your coat about him, and give him a drop of brandy from the bottle there.” How cold and clammy is his hand! Has he crossed the final barrier separating man from God—his Father or inexorable Judge? Will the world, and the things of the world know him no more? Has he evaded human justice for ever, and is he now trembling in presence of the Divine?

If some such questions as these vaguely suggest themselves to the bewildered brain of William, Josiah has other things to think of. He is wondering whether the cove has given him the slip after all; is wondering whether the reward will be as great for capturing the dead man as the living one; is deciding that he will do his utmost to fan the spark of life which may still be lingering in the stiffening body, in order to have it

quenched again in a lawful way, by the last dread executor of his country's laws—the hangman.

They lift the body, heavy as lead, between them, wrap it up as warmly as they can, and trudge away with it towards the city. William is the first to speak again.

“I don't see,” he begins, why we should take so much trouble to bring back the poor wretch to life, Josiah, neither. It would be far better, I think, if he should never open his eyes no more, for he's sure of the gallows now, if he do; if not for the first crime, at any rate, for the second; and drowning's better than hanging any day.”

“I'm ashamed of you, William. I wouldn't a took you for a comrade in this here work, if I'd known that your hideas was of that low natur. No, William, I'm a honest man, I am, and I'd scorn to cheat justice of its wictim. I hunts down the wictim, I won't let him make away with hisself, not if he wants to. I ketches, I binds, and I handcuffs him, and I hands him over to justice, and I says, ‘Hang him up, flog him, imprison him, and make an example of him for hothers.’ Them's my sentiments, William, and I glories in 'em. I ain't proud, pride is one of the deadly sins, but I thanks Evin for

having steeped me in them sentiments, which was inculcated in me from my youth up."

"You're a hard man, Josiah," said his companion, shifting his burden a little.

"I am," said the other, "I ain't butter nor honey, to melt in yer mouth, I'm made of iron. And what's more, I'm a religious man. I was driv' to chapel when I was a boy with the stick, and I goes there now, without no driving. If this chap here," indicating with a nod, the lifeless body he was bearing, "is dead, which I hope he ain't, then he's a self-murderer, and went slap-bang to hell. A self-murderer or 'fellow-d'ye-see,' which I've heerd is the right name for't, must go there slap-bang; he can't help hisself. He's damned eternal, he is. Now if I gives him time for repentance, he may git to Heaven after all, and if he'd made away with a hundred. Thus, on the one hand, I does this chap a good work by givin' him the chance of being saved (for what's the pain of being hanged-up, compared to the pains of damnation?) and I does justice a good work, on the hother hand, by delivering up its wictim. What do you say to that, William? ain't that killing two birds with one stone, with a wean-geance?"

"It sounds all right enough, Josiah, but

somehow it feels all wrong, and I don't like it. I do believe if I were to get into trouble, for all we're cronies, you'd betray me sooner than not—that you'd be glad to do it.”

“In coorse I should, William. If you go agin the laws, you must expect the laws to go agin you. Lor, I'd have the handcuffs round your wrists so neat and quick, that it would be a pleasure to you yourself to wear 'em.”

“And you wouldn't have no thought for my poor Betsy, who's expectin' her fifth next month, and the four little childer. You wouldn't think o' them, Josiah,” said the small man bitterly.

“Wives and childer,” retorted the other, serenely, “is harticles which I awoids, except when they're to be took; then I does my dooty by 'em. If I speaks hotherwise to a female, I flatters her, in order to hinduce her to open her mouth, which she does then, immediate. I never knew that to fail.”

They had reached Cloisterham by this time and now entered an inn, in the parlour of which they deposited their barden; and from this moment Josiah was too exclusively occupied in using every possible and probable means, assisted by a doctor, whom he had sent for immediately on their arrival, for the resuscitation of the apparently dead man, to

have any further time to bestow on the instruction of his companion in his own grand and enlightened principles of humanity. They laboured long in vain, and the doctor was inclined to pronounce the case as hopeless ; but Josiah still kept on, as tenderly solicitous as the most loving parent with an only child could be, to bring him back to life. At last, when even he was slackening in his labours, and giving utterance to a final opinion, "that the cove had been and done it, and that justice was shamefully defrauded," the doctor uttered a slight exclamation, and bent his ear to listen.

Was that a sigh issuing from the tightly closed lips ? Was that fancy, or a real quiver of the eyelids ?

In another moment, Josiah turned round in breathless satisfaction to William, sitting indifferently, and with averted head in the window-seat.

"Have them things ready, William. Quick !"

"For shame, for shame, Josiah ! Would you handcuff the dead ?"

"Dead ! He ain't no more dead than me or you. He's a coming round bootiful. He's opening his eyes, I tell you, William. That's about where it is, and no thanks to you, for I'm the man who's saved him."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

JOSIAH (the man of iron, as he proudly called himself) had been right in his prediction, that the gallant young man—who, by the mercy of God, had been upon the spot in time to rescue Rosa and her terrible lover from that watery grave, to which they would inevitably have been borne, but for his heroism—was only in a faint. Mr. Tartar had been carrying him but a few minutes, when he recovered full consciousness, and sufficient strength to enable him to proceed on his own feet, assisted by the sea-lieutenant's arm, until they reached Cloisterham. On arriving there, he abruptly thanked Mr. Tartar for his support, declared he was now perfectly restored, and that he preferred to return alone to his inn (he was a stranger in Cloisterham, he said) where he could change his clothes, and adopt some simple precautions against taking cold, the only thing he feared now on his own account. He made light of the swoon into which he had fallen, probably occasioned, he explained, by the effort of endeavouring, unassisted, to drag the bodies

to the shore, for his constitution had been weakened by a severe illness of long duration, from which he had but recently recovered. He expressed his satisfaction at having been successful in his endeavours to save the two unfortunates, and gave utterance to his fervent hope and conviction that they would be brought back to life again, having been, comparatively, so short a time in the water. Finally, he declined the earnest request of the sea-lieutenant, to be permitted to accompany him to the inn, and satisfy himself that his every want was attended to, with a decision and curtness almost uncourteous, and which tended considerably to damp the enthusiasm with which Mr. Tartar was inclined to regard him. The discomfited sea-lieutenant was forced to let him depart alone, after begging permission to wait upon him next day with news—God grant good news!—of the others, and assure himself that their brave rescuer had sustained no injury to his own health; and then, with a repetition of his warmest thanks and most heartfelt gratitude, he watched him disappear into the night.

For a further minute or two the puzzled and bewildered young man stood looking after the stranger, who had left him so unceremoniously and abruptly, and who had

put away all notion of thanks with a slighting motion of his hand, and the ungraciously curt remark that he had only done his duty, and what any other man, deserving the name, must have done, in endeavouring to save two perishing fellow creatures—feeling as if his warm heart had been soused in cold water, as well as his body. But the remembrance of Rosa, and his cruel anxiety concerning her fate, soon swallowed up thought of all else, and he hastened after the Minor Canon, who had sped on before with his precious burden, wisely adopting the precaution of calling at the house of the family doctor on his way, and inducing him to accompany him.

They found the usually quiet home in Minor Canon Corner in a state of wild confusion and alarm. The servants were scuttling hither and thither, with no apparent object, or crowding round the door of poor Rosa's little room to get a look at the pretty darling, cold and dead. Only the Minor Canon and the handsome, proud Miss Landless preserved anything like self-command under these distressing circumstances.

“She can't have no heart at all,” said sobbing Mary, from behind her apron, to sobbing cook, just emerging from hers, to take a curious survey of the little motionless

figure, so still and beautiful, “or she’d have a tear now, at all events, and her eyes is as dry as a bone. Missus has her faults, and far be it from me to wish to conceal ’em, but she’ve got a kind heart at bottom; see how she’s a taking on, cook. I ain’t got no patience with them ’aughty, cold-blooded ones, and I can’t abear that Miss Landless.”

But Helena, cold and hard-hearted as the world from below-stairs had just pronounced her, was the only one capable of carrying out, with a steady hand, the directions given by the Minor Canon—was the only one who could take off the wet clothes clinging to the frozen limbs of the lifeless girl, and wrapping her in warm blankets, lay her on her own little white bed; for cook couldn’t, for the life of her, touch a corpse—the very idea turned her blood to water; and Mary shrieked out a vehement negation of a proposal that she should help; and the china shepherdess herself, although willing and ready, was blinded by the tears which coursed down her usually rosy cheeks, now pale with apprehension and alarm, and her nominal help was little better than nothing. It required stern and almost harsh words, rare from the mild lips of the master of the house, to subdue the untimely agitation of the china

shepherdess, and to bring the frightened servants to a sense of their duty: but at length something like order was restored, fires were lit, hot bottles were prepared, and the work of wrestling with death for his almost certain prey was carried on with vigour. It was no time for selfish thoughts or selfish longings, and the Minor Canon was the last man in the world to indulge in such, but his heart swelled, and his eye brightened involuntarily with wonder and admiration when it rested by chance on the pale, composed face of the brave girl his heart had chosen, and he felt how dearly that he loved and honoured her.

Mr. Tartar and the doctor had entered the house together, and the latter had proceeded at once to the room where poor Rosa lay, sternly prohibiting the servants from entering unless they were summoned; while the sea-lieutenant, feeling almost as if he had violated his promise to Rosa in coming into the house again, made his way noiselessly to the little drawing-room, thinking he might venture to sit there awhile, and await the doctor's verdict. There he found Neville and Mr. Grewgious; the former sitting in a low chair, with his head almost resting on his knees, and drawing a long, gasping sob, from time to time, like

a child who has exhausted itself with violent weeping, but has by no means exhausted the intensity of its sorrow; and the latter regarding, with a certain rigidity of woe, the wasting and the dying fire. Both looked up as Mr. Tartar entered, but both drooped their heads again as they saw that he was neither the bearer of good news, or any news whatever. Neville drew his breath painfully and sobbingly once more, and the old man began to murmur again, as he had murmured ever since he had heard of the catastrophe: "Like her mother! O, pitiful God, just like her mother!"

Mr. Tartar felt he had no words to alleviate such bitter sorrow as this; and cold and shivering—for though he had not been actually in the water, his clothes had been much splashed and wetted—he sat down silently before the fire, which he stirred mechanically, trying to gather hope from the simile, that even as the faint spark under his hands burned up into new life and vigour, so the faint spark of life upstairs might, by careful fanning and attention, be revived once more, the while he listened, with strained attention, for any sound which might proceed from the room above, where she was lying. There was no lamp in the room, but the

moonshine streamed in through the unshuttered windows, lighting it up weirdly, and making the accustomed articles of furniture look strange and unreal.

Since the arrival of the doctor, and the exercise of the doctor's authority, the noise and confusion had subsided into absolute quiet—quiet so undisturbed and intense, that it seemed as if it must draw its origin from death. Only the low, painfully-rending sobs of Neville, and the muttered words of the scared Collector of Rents : “ Like her mother. Merciful God, just like her mother ! ” broke the profound silence, and they, in their pitiful hopelessness, might have issued from the grave.

Helena, kneeling by the bedside, had slightly raised her dark eyes as the grave doctor came in, and then, as if she could not bear to read in his expression that hope was in vain, had buried her pale face in the snowy bed linen, trembling from head to foot, but uttering neither sob nor sound. The china shepherdess wiped her streaming eyes, and both she and her son looked imploringly at their old friend as if the issues of life and death lay in his hands, and they were, mutely but most eloquently, beseeching him to bring back the young life, almost fled for ever. The

family doctor was also the "medical man" (as Miss Twinkleton preferred to style him) of the Nuns' House, and ever since pretty Rosa, a tiny, bright-eyed little girl, had become an inmate thereof, he had attended her in her various little ailments.

He had re-vaccinated her, on an occasion when small-pox had been rife in Cloisterham; had brought her through whooping-cough, measles, scarlatina, and other ills to which youth are subject; and he loved the child, as every one did with whom she came in contact. Something like emotion was working in his rugged face, as he looked down upon her now.

He took the little passive hand and laid his own upon the quiet heart. Did it beat, though faintly, or was it still for ever?

With the imploring eyes of mother and son upon him always—Helena continued to kneel motionless, with her face hidden—he repeated this performance, with still more impressive gravity; felt the cold feet, to which no amount of hot bottles could bring the warm blood; took a lighted candle from a table close by, and holding the small, tightly-clenched hand before the flame, regarded it intently; then he held the same candle carefully to her lips.

Finally, with a compassionate look at the

two observing him and his every action so narrowly, with subdued, though intense emotion, he put the candle down again, let his glance rest for a moment on the dark bowed head, half-buried in the counterpane, and said, using the only words of hope he could use with truth—

“She is not quite dead—yet.”

Not quite dead yet! Then there is still a chance, and we must make the most of it, and wrestle once more and with renewed vigour, with cruel death for his almost certain prey.

Heat blankets there, before the fire. Chafe the cold limbs. Use every means which human experience and human skill can employ to induce the almost frozen blood to circulate again; to make the stiffening limbs supple once more; to resuscitate this image, wondrously fair yet, but which death would turn in a few short days to loathsome clay, and make it the beauteous habitation of a loving and a living spirit, as it was before.

She is not dead—yet! Then labour to restore her, dear friends who love her, again and yet again, unwearied and unwearying. While there is life, there is hope; and hope grows stronger every minute.

Death, astonished at this determined opposition, draws back, removes his icy hand from

the heart, beating now audibly, and makes at last a final retreat. How joyfully the doctor, breaking forth in the words of the great Conqueror of Death for ever, exclaims—

“Friends, be of good cheer. The maid is not dead, but sleepeth.”

She stirred, half-opened her eyes, then closed them, exhausted; trembled, quivered, uttered a faint moan, as if in pain.

The doctor's face grew grave, and he examined her uneasily, as he stooped down over her.

She opened her eyes again; this time, wide and wildly. She stared about her, and at the doctor, but without comprehension of where she was. She even seemed to try to repulse him with her feeble hand, as she muttered—

“Eddy, Eddy!”

She had come back to life, but not to consciousness. As the colour returned to her cheeks, it burned there with a fierceness and intensity terrifying and alarming. As the warmth came back to her members, they glowed like living fire. As the heart, which had almost ceased its labours, commenced work once more, it appeared as if it were trying to make up for lost time, so furiously did it palpitate. The exposure, terror, strain

upon her courage, had proved too much for her delicate constitution. Rosa was in a raging fever.

For many days the sorrowful watchers by her sick bed feared that death, foiled in one attempt, had only beaten a sham retreat, in order to attack from another side with renewed vigour, and more complete success.

They cut off, weeping, the long bright brown hair from the restless head, ever tossing to and fro upon the pillow, and laid ice upon it to still its fatal burning.

They listened with agitated hearts and subdued breath, to the incoherent words which issued from the innocent lips; and let hot tears fall as they prayed to God for help and succour, acknowledging with deep humility that only He could wrestle successfully with their remorseless enemy, and imploring Him to give them back their treasure.

The china shepherdess, abashed and contrite under the words of reproof for her weakness from her idolised son, had learned to subdue all untimely expression of her grief, and was one of the constant and untired nurses of the poor little patient. Helena, in compliance with her own earnest wish, was the other.

At first the doctor had opposed this, some-

what vehemently; had declared that Miss Landless' strength was inadequate to the hard duties of the situation; that her slight frame would give way under the fatigue of constant night watching, and she would probably fall an easy victim to possible infection from the fever. He would provide a trained and experienced nurse, who would be competent to carry out his instructions.

But Helena, supported by the Revd. Sept, whom she had gained over to her side, turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of the doctor, and reduced that somewhat tyrannical practitioner to a qualified and unwilling submission.

Woe betide her if those doubtful grey eyes, watching her askant, and sharpened with the wish to do so, should find any sin of omission or commission to lay at her door.

"The men are all alike," he muttered to himself, savagely, as he turned his steps homeward. "A pretty face, a pair of dark or blue eyes, lifted beseechingly, and they lose every atom of that superior sense given them by Providence, and are as weak as a child in leading-strings. I always go out of the house when my Polly begins to cry—dear little soul! What's the good of being a Samson, if one lets one's self be fooled by a Delilah? I've no patience with the lad!"

Yet the Revd. Septimus had not yielded without a struggle. He had remonstrated with the girl he loved; he had pointed out the danger she would incur. But when the proud face began to tremble; when the radiant eyes filled with tears; (he had never seen her shed tears before, and it was astonishing what pain they gave him, and to what a weak and helpless condition they reduced him) when she *begged* him to permit her to perform this labour of love; adding, as she saw that he was yielding, in her soft, thrilling voice, always softened when she addressed him, and then so wondrously convincing and sweet, that she was sure—sure that no hired nurse could care for her sweet friend as she would do, that love would teach her to be quick, quiet and prompt in carrying out the doctor's directions, and that they should see that she was capable of doing what she undertook—then what could the Minor Canon do but grant her request? What would *you* have done, my friend?

You would have been a very Brutus, no doubt. You would have killed Cæsar to save Rome—struck her you loved a cruel blow, to save her from the possibility of a worse one. And how grateful she would have been to you afterwards!

Who can resist a woman when she begs? Ah, if they only knew the secret of their unlimited power! What husband can turn a deaf ear to a wife's appeal, when she makes it—not querulously or peevishly, or authoritatively—but with soft arms round his neck, with soft cheek pressed against his bearded one? What price can be too heavy to pay for the bliss of that moment? And men pay heavy prices, many a time.

So the two women, whom the Minor Canon loved, sat in turns by the sick bed, and sank upon their knees to pray there—such earnest prayers as only those can utter who have had to wrestle with despair; for day followed day, and night, night, and the shadow of death still lay heavy on the once happy home in Minor Canon Corner.

END OF VOL. II.





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